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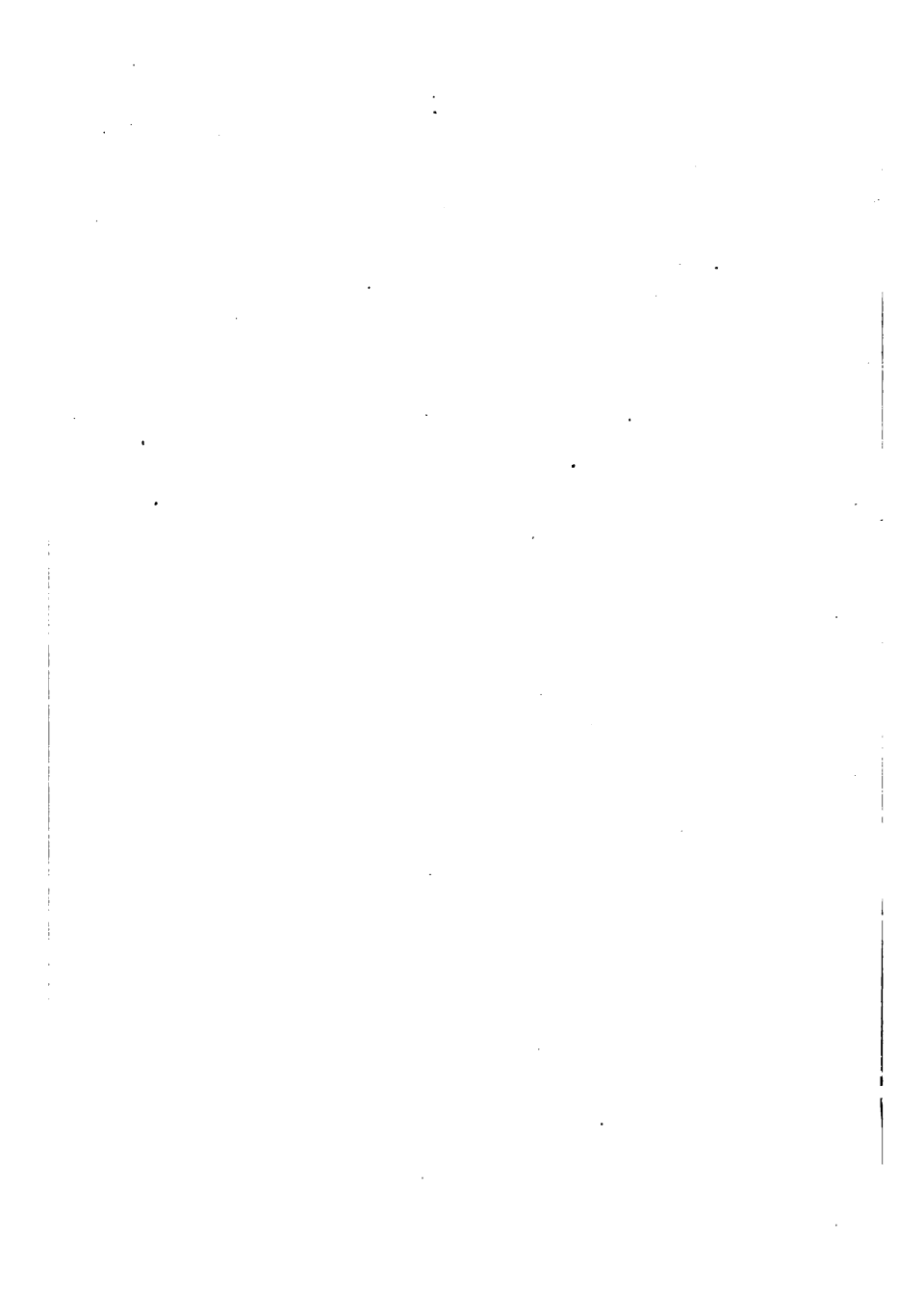
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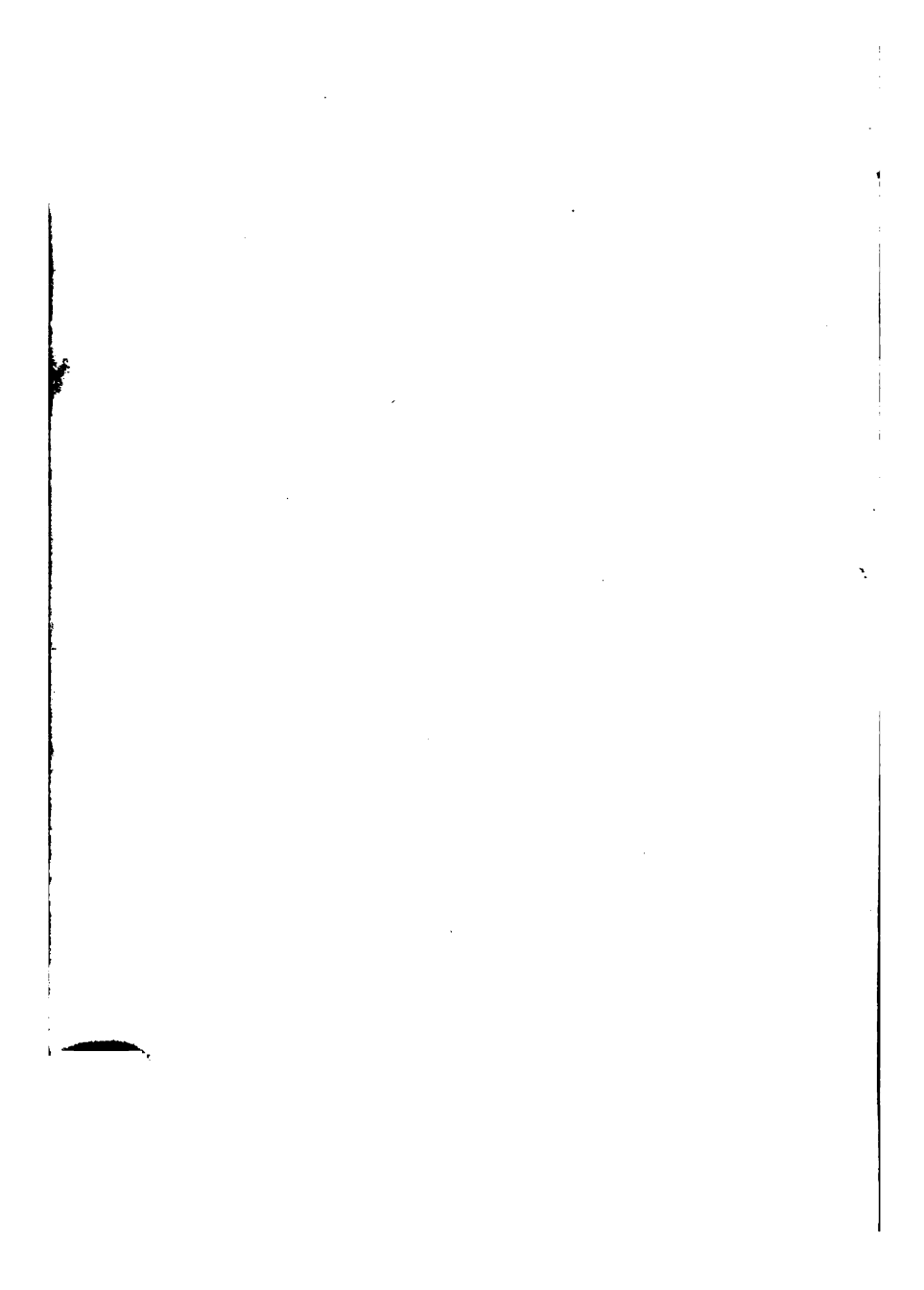
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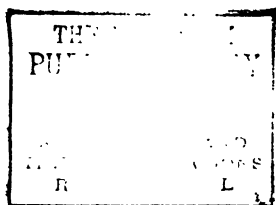
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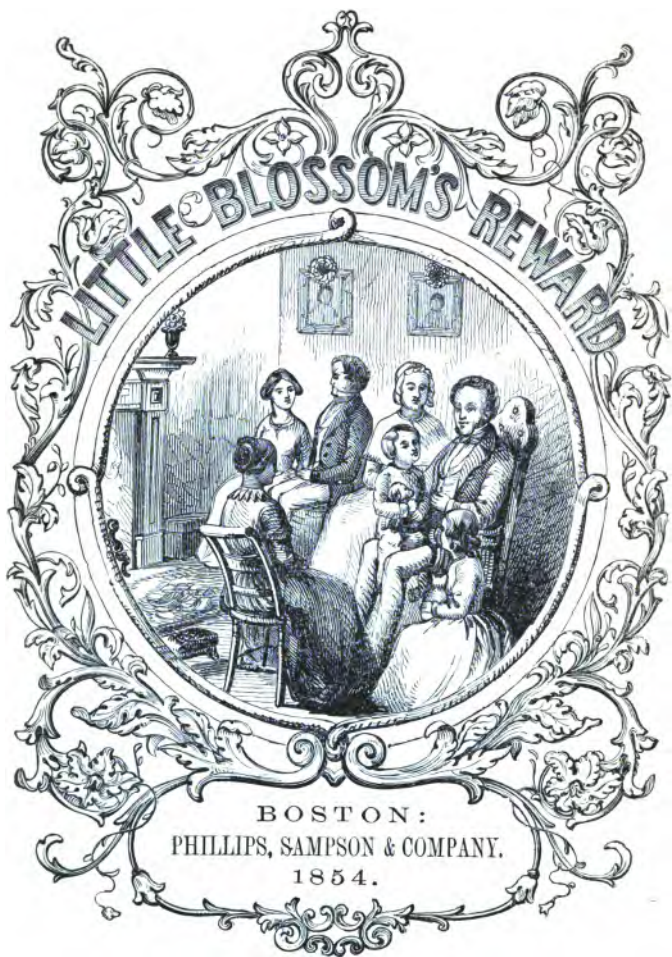
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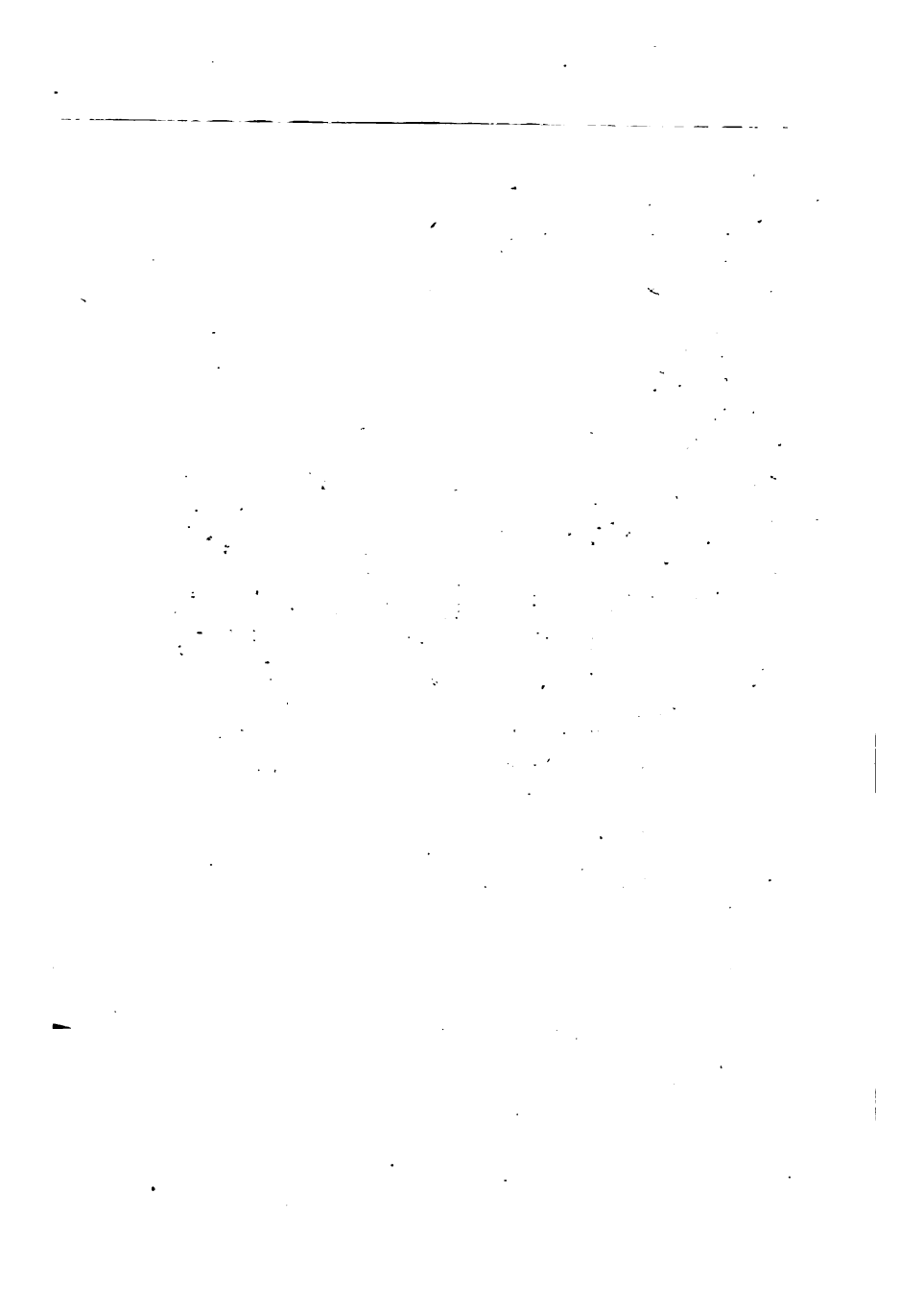




BOSTON:  
PHILLIPS, SAMPSON & COMPANY.  
1854.







# LITTLE BLOSSOM'S

## REWARD.

*A Christmas Book for Children.*

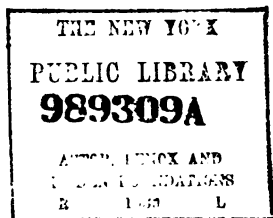
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MRS. EMILY HARE, PERSONA.

ILLUSTRATED.

BOSTON :  
PHILLIPS, SAMPSON, AND COMPANY,  
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1882



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STEREOTYPED AT THE  
BOSTON STEREOTYPE FOUNDRY.

TO MY OWN

**Little Blossom**

THIS LITTLE BOOK

IS DEDICATED

BY HER MOTHER.

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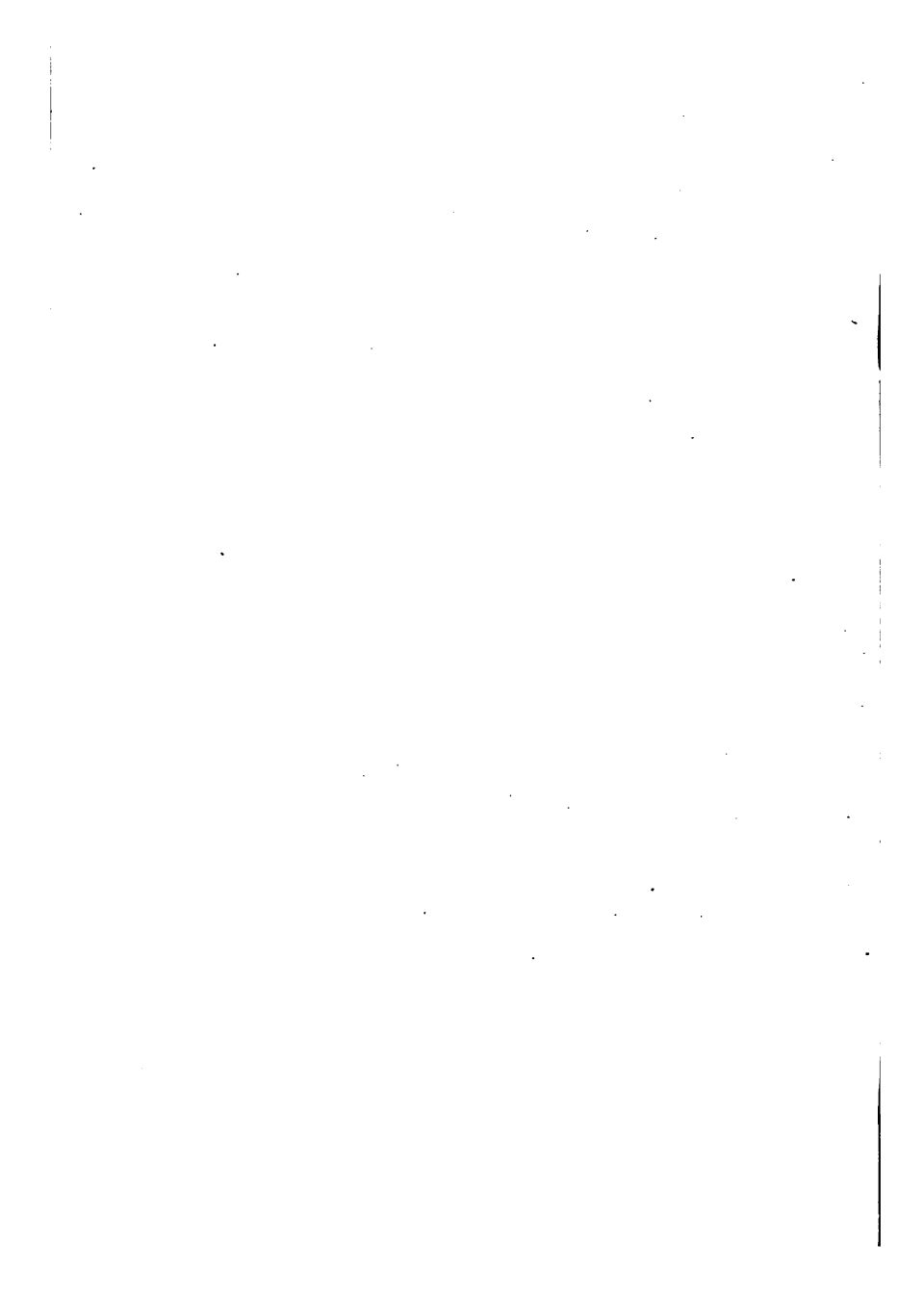
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# LITTLE BLOSSOM'S REWARD.

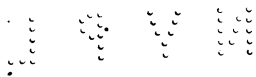
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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

LITTLE BLOSSOM was a very sweet little girl, who lived with her father and mother in a beautiful country place, where she had every thing around her that could make a child happy. Her real name was not Blossom ; but every one called her so because she was good, and as lovely and pretty as an opening flower. But what her name really was I am afraid you will never find out, for I do not intend to tell you. Her father and mother loved her very dearly ; and she had one brother, a little younger than herself, whose name was George. They were very happy together, and had many

delightful ways of passing their time, and a hundred pretty games that they could play, besides books, toys, and babyhouses for rainy days. Their papa's house stood upon a sloping hillside, and was well shaded with fine large trees. A green and beautiful lawn extended to the foot of the hill, scattered with little groves and thickets of shrubbery, where so many singing birds had made their nests that early in a summer's morning the whole air was filled with music. Behind the house, at some little distance, was a large garden full of flowers and fruit; and, still farther in the rear, noble woods of oak, chestnut, walnut, and many other fine trees extended for a long distance, and also skirted the lawn on either side down to the foot of the hill, giving a look of shelter and seclusion to the place. From the wide, airy piazza Blossom could look at the blue sea about a mile distant, and many little rocky islands, where the surf broke white and foaming, with a far-off murmur that



she loved to hear. On one of these islands stood a lighthouse, whose cone-like form, as it shone in the sun, contrasted beautifully with the black rocks and level waves below. That lighthouse had always been a delightful mystery to Blossom's little mind. Her papa called it "Tom all alone's;" but she fancied it the abode of some giant or enchanter, one of the strange beings she had read about in the story books. But now the mystery was solved. One happy day last summer, (could the children ever forget its delights?) her papa took George and herself out rowing in his boat, and they actually landed on that *very* island, and went to that *very* lighthouse. It was indeed a charming place, but very different from what they had supposed it to be. There they found no giant or ogre, but a very good-natured old man, and a little old woman who did not look quite so good natured, but who sold beer, and apples, and the nicest little cakes you ever saw. Blossom fancied that she scolded

a little ; but she certainly made capital cakes, or else the row on the water had a wonderful effect on their appetites. The island was much larger than Blossom had supposed it to be ; from the top of the hill it did not seem bigger than a pocket handkerchief, but it was really a great deal larger than papa's garden. The old people who lived there had a snug little house by the side of the lighthouse, which looked as neat as wax, and a garden which contained some stunted apple trees, some cabbages and currant bushes, and a few old-fashioned flowers, such as marigolds and four-o'clocks. The children thought it a beautiful place ; but they were soon tempted away from it by a view of a fine sand beach not far off, and they raced up and down upon its hard, smooth floor, and filled their pockets with pebbles and pretty things. They each gathered, too, a large bag of shells, beautiful gold and silver and white ones, and scollops, periwinkles, and crabs' claws ! It was a very

happy day, and they ended it with a bath in the refreshing salt water, which broke in tempting creamy ripples on the beach. And now they still kept those shells safe in their playroom, and they were among the best play-things they had. They served for a great many purposes. Sometimes they were boats, a fleet of fairy boats; sometimes flower pots in a mimic garden; sometimes teacups and saucers for dolls. They were indeed much-loved treasures. But Blossom and George had many other amusements besides these. They had each a little garden of their own, where they were very fond of working with tools just large enough for them to manage. In Blossom's garden was a large daily rose tree, which always had a rose upon it every morning in summer to give to papa, some violets, a wall flower, a little tiny peach tree that she had raised from a stone the year before, some chicken corn, and many other pretty things. George had a currant bush, a white

lily, a yellow rose, and some string beans and sweet corn, and three potatoes. They were very proud of their gardens, and had actually had vegetables from them cooked, and put upon mamma's table.

Blossom and her brother were so happy as to be always surrounded by what was beautiful and lovely ; and they had the kindest of friends, who loved them and taught them to love these things. They were gay, cheerful, and good little children. They loved dearly to play in the beautiful wood near the house, and to look at the little wood plants with their delicate leaves, that grew among last year's decaying foliage — the anemone, the hepatica, the Solomon's seal, the pyrola, and the wintergreen. They loved to lie upon the soft green moss, and look up into the trees, among the interlacing boughs, and watch the light glancing upon the quivering leaves, and the shadows moving across the gray branches and great trunks crusted over with

lichens. The shadows were beautiful, too, Blossom thought, upon the green grass below ; they never were still, any more than my little sprite of a Blossom herself. But the sky, so blue and deep, above and through the tree tops—that was lovelier than all. It seemed to melt into her heart, and to make her feel like soaring, and loving every thing. She could not describe the feelings it gave her ; but she loved the sky best when she saw it far up through the openings among the rich foliage of those summer woods. But best of all was a wild, merry little hoiden of a brook, that came dancing and tumbling through the wood, and down the hillside, as if it were crazy to get into the sunshine again. This brook was as good as a playmate for George and herself, and would talk and sing away to them through the whole of a long summer's day. Many an hour — nay, many a half holiday—they spent in damming it up with sticks and stones, and then suddenly

pulling down the whole fabric, to see what a great splash and leap it would make. It was glorious fun! A famous place, too, it was for sailing boats; and many a launch they had, and many a wreck, and many a race between their rival craft, upon its hurrying waters. Or if, when tired of these sports, they sat very quietly upon a large flat rock, to read fairy tales or study their lessons, they would sometimes see a squirrel come down slyly from a tree to drink, or a little bird taking a bath in a shallow pool between the stones. The squirrels were very tame in that wood, and were so used to the children that they were not at all afraid of them, but would sometimes come quite near, and even venture to take an acorn or a nut from their hands, and then dart off to the top of a high tree, and chatter, and frisk, and whisk about over their heads. The kindly wood gave the children still other pleasures. They built a house for themselves there, of evergreen



branches, where they played Robinson Crusoe and the Swiss Family; and sometimes they pretended that they were the babes in the wood, but the robins would never come to cover them with leaves. Then, in the long October afternoons, the nutting came—*that* was splendid! Papa would climb the trees, and shake down the nuts; and then how the children would run about, and scramble and shout, to see which could pick them fastest, or fill a bag the soonest! Mamma would help them too; and sometimes she would put a sly handful or two into one bag, and sometimes into the other, so that there was great excitement and frolic. Then papa would come scrambling down, like a great wildcat, from the tree, and pounce upon Blossom, and pretend to eat her up, and there would be great shrieking and chasing about; and before it was fairly over, up papa would be in another tall hickory tree! Then a prickly chestnut burr would fall upon Blossom's head, or stick

into poor George's foot, and a great outcry would be made for a moment, and soon the cause of it would be quite forgotten in the joy of some new-found treasure. They gathered whortleberries sometimes in the woods, or blackberries and mushrooms in the pasture, and, at sunset, often enjoyed a row in papa's boat, or a pleasant walk with mamma by the sea shore. Thus their happy days passed away; but you must not suppose that they were idle children, and spent all their time in play. O, no, indeed! — they would not then have been so happy. Their mamma taught them every morning, in the library; and they were diligent and teachable, and knew more than most children of their age. They were like their friend, the wild and restless little brook, when at play; but when playtime was over, they had been taught to study and work with all their might. Not that they were ever very grave. No, nor was their dear mamma. She made their lessons

so pleasant to them, that they were nicer than play, and read to them, after the lesson was ended, in delightful books, to reward them for their industry, or showed them prints of birds, animals, and insects, which she explained, and about which she told them stories. These hours were the pleasantest in the day to them; for she was young enough not to have forgotten that she had once been a child. She loved the wood, the garden, and the brook as well as they, and was often their playmate there; nor was papa above a game of romps on the piazza, or at hide and seek among the trees.

But all these delights were now over. Winter had come, and had brought pleasures of his own, to make up for those he had taken away. A deep snow had fallen earlier than usual; and all day long the children had been at the window, watching the pure and beautiful flakes, as they sometimes fell steadily and thickly to the ground, and sometimes

were drifted about into waving white curtains, and strange shapes in the air, by the gusts of roaring wind, blotting the distant landscape entirely from view. But now the sun shone out clear and bright, and a vast snowy carpet covered the whole world as far as they could see, while rich and heavy masses hung upon the evergreens and incrusting the leeward side of each trunk of the great leafless trees. The brook was no longer like Blossom in her frolicsome mood, but more like my little girl when fast asleep, and was nicely tucked under a snow-white coverlet, under which you could hear it slipping and stealing along with a gentle murmur, like her quiet breathing. The great rocks and stones that were flung about its bed, and strewn along its course, were hung with icicle curtains, and the old trees spread their boughs kindly overhead, and sheltered it from the violence of the tempest: so the brook was likely to be as snug as a dormouse till the spring awakened

it to its madcap pranks again. Now Blossom had many a ride upon George's sled, and many a roll and tumble in the snow. A great snow man was built, with papa's help, under the library window, with an old hat on his head, and a staff in his hand, and a huge beard of icicles, that they found under the spout of the pump, hanging from his chin, so that he looked like a statue of old Winter himself.

At the foot of the hill the brook spread itself into a little pond or lake, and just here there stood an old mill on the edge of a pine grove, where the brook, taking its last leap over the rocks, bade adieu to its frolicsome mood, and became a useful member of society. It was a pretty place; and the children loved to go there in summer, to watch the water falling swiftly over the dam, dripping from the great wheel, and then rushing with a thundering noise through the flume. Below the dam, where the water was still, grew that queen-like flower, the water lily, and its spreading leaves lay,

like a fleet of fairy rafts, in the tiny bays and inlets of the place. They could gather many other pretty water plants on the brink, and there George found cat-tails among the reeds, and Blossom gathered many a bunch of wild flowers for mamma. The water was so clear that they could see the fishes darting to and fro, casting rippled shadows upon the pebbly bottom; and they often saw the kingfisher sitting on a pollard willow, that hung over the stream, to watch for them. They became quite familiar with the great bullfrogs, the water rats, and other creatures that haunted the spot, and sometimes amused themselves with catching the mud turtles, which they carried home for pets. But now the mill pond was a splendid place to slide. It was firmly frozen over, and the mill dam and mill wheel were beautifully hung with icicles, so that underneath they looked like a cave of stalactites, and Blossom called it the Grotto of Antiparos. George was trying manfully to learn to skate,

and went there every morning to practise, heedless of tumbles, black eyes, and seeing stars.

One thing, however, just now absorbed their thoughts more than any thing else. Christmas was at hand ! Only two days off was that glorious day, with all the joys it would bring. Grandmamma had come, and aunt Emily, with aunt Alice, uncle Will, and uncle George ; and the arrival of Santa Claus was only waited for to complete their happiness. The children had already enjoyed many a great frolic with their uncles and aunts, and heard many a droll song and story from them. Uncle Will and aunt Emily were very lively and merry ; they were younger than Blossom's mamma ; but uncle George and aunt Alice were graver, for they were older than she. But none of the party were ever very grave or solemn, especially at the merry Christmas time. Indeed, people used to say that Blossom's grandmamma looked almost as young as her mamma, and her mamma almost as young as Blossom herself ; so none

of them could have been very ancient or dismal people. The day that they all came grew dark very early, for it was snowing; and before the lamps were lighted there was a great capering about of the children by the fire-light, and dancing to the merry tunes that mamma played on the piano, in which some of those who were not children joined; and uncle Will played such remarkable antics, that he made poor Blossom laugh so hard that she fell and rolled over and over on the floor. Then aunt Emily sung the drollest songs you ever heard, and all joined in the chorus, — even papa, who could not sing a note! — and made a very odd sound indeed. But at last the children were so tired with their frolic and fun, that they had to be carried up stairs, to rest themselves in their snug little beds in the nursery.



## CHAPTER II.

## CHRISTMAS EVE.

It was the day before Christmas. Their mamma and aunts were very busy in the dining room all the afternoon, and would not even let the children peep through the crack of the door. They wondered and guessed in vain, but they could not find out what was going on there, although they had great hopes of a Christmas tree, such as they had last year, and thought that Santa Claus must be in the room talking to mamma about it. Their impatience would have been too great to be endured, if uncle Will and uncle George had not taken them down to the mill pond, for a sliding and skating lesson. They all carried brooms, and swept off the light snow from a large space upon the ice, and had a very

pleasant time. When they were tired, they stood still and watched their uncles, as they darted across the ice, and made eagles and cut figures and letters in the ice, for they were splendid skaters. Uncle Will was always telling George about the fine time he was having at college; and George was never weary of his stories, but thought that nothing could be so delightful as to go there too, and determined to study hard, and make haste to be a man. His papa said he was to begin Latin soon; and this was the first step towards becoming a scholar and a skater, like uncle Will. When they came home, Orion and the Pleiads were beginning to appear in the sky, and a young moon threw the shadows of the trees in soft yet distinct outlines upon the snow. It was a lovely night, and not half so cold as it had been; so that the children could stop, as they went along, to look up into the sky, and trace out the constellations of stars, as their uncles taught them. By the

time they returned to the house, they could find "the great huge Bear," "the little small wee Bear," Cassiopeia's Chair, and Orion. They found the lamp lighted in the parlor, but no one was there but papa and grandmamma, for even uncle Will had mysteriously disappeared as soon as he entered the hall with them. They were so much interested, however, in telling about their adventures on the pond, and in looking again for the Bears out of the window, that they forgot that it was Christmas eve entirely, until mamma came in, looking very smiling. "Come, Blossom — come, George," said she; "I have something to show you in the dining room." *Now*, to be sure, their hearts began to beat and their eyes to sparkle, for they felt certain that something *very* pleasant was going to happen. When they had all reached the dining room, papa said, "Knock;" so they knocked — and who should open the door but Santa Claus himself! He was dressed in a furred cloak that hung down to his feet, and

had a long beard and snow-white hair, with a tall hat on his head about three feet high, that ended in a point, and very strange peaked shoes, that turned up at the toes. He had a great rod in his hand ; and before he would let the children come in, he said in a very gruff, stern voice, "Have these children been good ?" "Yes," said their mamma ; "they have been good and diligent." "Are they sorry for all the wrong they have done?" "Yes," said Blossom and George, with timid voices ; "we are sorry." "Come in, then," said Santa Claus ; and he broke the rod with a great snap, and threw it on the floor. As he threw open the door, and marched before them with a stately step into the room, they thought he seemed to smile ; but they were not sure, because of his great beard. But what was the beautiful sight that they saw as soon as they entered ? In the middle of the brilliantly-lighted room stood a tall fir tree, that reached to the ceiling, hung with beautiful

colored lamps and candles, red-cheeked apples, gilt nuts, and pretty cakes and bonbons, besides fruit of various kinds, gay ribbons, flowers, and little verses printed on colored paper. Then there were books and toys in great abundance hanging from the tree; and sitting at its foot was a beautiful doll, dressed in pink, whose eyes would open and shut. And what do you think she was sitting upon? A workbox, filled with all sorts of useful things, to employ Blossom's little fingers! I cannot tell you half the other fine things that were there. There was a Noah's ark, a farmyard, a set of teacups and saucers, a sword, and a gun, and many other beautiful toys, with a box of tools, and a set of ninepins, together with games of all sorts for winter evenings. Exclamations of delight broke from both the children at once; and George could not contain himself at the sight of a large rocking horse, that he saw in the full light of the brilliant tree. They turned to thank Santa Claus for his kindness;

but he had disappeared, and they saw him no more. Soon after uncle Will entered the room, and expressed great astonishment at all that was to be seen there. No one had been forgotten ; there were gifts for all ; and the servants were soon called in to see and share with the rest in the joyous scene. After an hour of the greatest pleasure and enjoyment had passed, and the children had received as many good things as mamma thought best, they were at last sent up stairs, their eyes shining with delight while they winked with sleepiness, and their little feet, that staggered with fatigue, still dancing for joy.

## CHAPTER III.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE next day was Christmas. It was a very happy day for George and Blossom. The first thought that entered George's head, when he awoke in the morning, was the joyous one that he had a rocking horse; and while he lay, with half-shut eyes, thinking about it, up popped Blossom's head from her little bed on the other side of the nursery. Then they got up very slyly, and put on their stockings, but not their shoes, and stole softly to their nurse's bed, who heard them, but pretended to be asleep. "Merry Christmas! merry Christmas!" they shouted in her ears, and then clapped their hands, and jumped for joy to think that they had caught her. She kissed them both, and wished them a merry Christmas, and then they

crept quietly to mamma's room. Here there was again a great shouting and kissing ; and the same went on at all the other doors. But just as they were mounting the next flight of stairs, and thinking they were as still as mice, out burst uncle Will, nearly dressed, from his room, and chased them, shrieking, all over the house. Then they went down to the dining room, and there still stood the lovely Christmas tree, which looked very pretty yet, though the lights were put out, and many of the toys and gay things taken down. George mounted his rocking horse, sword in hand, and had a glorious ride, while Blossom seized her doll, and examined her toys, till at last she became so absorbed in a new book of animals, which was full of stories of elephants and tigers, that she forgot every thing else.

After breakfast they all got into a large sleigh, that would hold I don't know how many people, and had a delightful drive to church. Swiftly and lightly they flew over the snow,



by the mill, the pine grove, along the sea shore, where the water looked almost black in contrast with the new-fallen snow upon the beach, past houses, and farms, and fences that seemed to be running away from them, till they came to a village where there was a pretty little rural-looking church. In summer it must have been a beautiful place, for the tall elms mingled their boughs above it, and their twigs were traced upon the deep blue sky, like a cathedral roof, while below the snow formed a floor more spotless than marble. Within the church summer seemed indeed to have come again, for all was green and beautiful with hemlock and pine boughs, and long wreaths of laurel and ivy. The air was sweet and fragrant; and the organ was swelling in triumphant tones, to celebrate the birth of Him who was "a child, yet God our King." They thought, as they sat there and listened to the sacred words of Scripture, that He, who had once been a little child like them, had from that hour tenderly

loved little children, and that his blessing would ever be with them. When the anthem of praise arose, it seemed as though the angels themselves must be singing "Glory to God in the highest," so beautiful did the music seem to the children. These joyous yet solemn feelings remained with them after they left the sacred building, and they returned home again with thoughtful, happy hearts.

The great Christmas dinner was over, and they were all sitting by the fireside in the evening.

"Blossom," said mamma, "you know I told you that you and your brother were to have a reward, during the holidays, for having been unusually diligent and industrious lately. What would you like it to be?"

Blossom was silent for a few minutes, and her eyes looked very bright. She had indeed been diligent, and so had George. She had learned the whole multiplication table lately, and the boundaries and capitals of all the

United States, and had improved very much in her writing ; while George had learned to make pothooks and round o's, had gone through addition, and could read and spell very nicely ; and both could repeat many little poems and hymns. They had endeavored, too, to be good and obedient, which was better still, and to live together in love and harmony with each other. After a few minutes' silence, Blossom exclaimed,—

“O mamma ! I know what I would like. I would like to have every one tell me a story.”

“O, yes, yes !” said George ; “that would be the nicest thing in the world.”

“Very well,” said mamma ; “if your friends are willing to be so kind, you shall have a story told to you every night of the holidays, before bedtime. Ask them if they will do it for you.”

Blossom took George's hand, and went round the room, and asked papa and grandmamma, and each of her uncles and aunts, if they would

tell her a story ; and she looked so coaxingly in their faces that they could not have said No, if they would. So they all said, "Yes, dear children, we will do our best to amuse you, because you have been so good."

"You will, I am sure, mamma," said Blossom.

"Certainly, darlings," said mamma.

"But I want pussy to hear it too ; may I bring her ?"

"And may I bring my dog ?" said George.

"O, yes, if they will be still and good."

So Blossom ran out of the room, and soon returned with a beautiful white kitten, without a single black hair, whose name was Blanche ; and George brought a pretty King Charles spaniel, which he called Frisk.

"Who will begin ? Who has a story for Blossom and George ?" said mamma.

"I have," said papa.

So Blossom got a footstool, and sat down by her father's side, with Blanche in her arms, and her eyes fixed on his face ; and George and

Frisk mounted to his knee. "Listen, children," said papa. They did not need to be told that; they were both as still as mice.

#### A STORY ABOUT SANTA CLAUS.

Once on a time Santa Claus took it into his wise head that he was quite tired of taking so much trouble, every year, and of travelling about from house to house with a load of toys and sugar plums, for a set of good-for-nothing children. "It is all time and trouble thrown away," said he to himself; "I never have either thanks or reward, and the children care no more for me than if I were dead. It is only my gifts that they value. I'll undertake the thankless office no more; they may go to the toy shops and buy their own toys, and this year I shall stay comfortably at home, and save my old rheumatic bones many an ache from the cold, and my neck many a twist from climbing in and out of those narrow, dirty

chimneys. I have made a fool of myself too long already, and I will do so no more."

So he neither provided himself with toys, cakes, nor any good or pretty things at all, that year, but sat down in his own chimney corner, chuckling a little to himself to think what wonder and trouble there would be that night, when he did not appear. Still his mind ran sorely upon the children ; for he was fond of the little creatures to weakness, though he was a bachelor, and never had any of his own, but lived all alone, in a little one-story house, in a blind alley. As he sat, warming his fat little person, and rubbing his short, round legs, by the fire, he seemed to see in the embers sad young faces that looked reproachfully at him. He turned his broad face away, and, lo ! the shadows on the wall seemed to take the form of little children, who were crying and mourning. Hiss-s-s ! a long sigh burst from the back-log, and was followed by a shrill, whining sound, that was very melancholy and dispiriting.

The wind rose, and whistled through every crack and keyhole ; and it sounded to his ears like the cry of a forsaken child. It seemed to call to him, and say, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus! where are you? Had you not nights enough in the year in which to be comfortable at home, without this?"

He rose, and, waddling to the window, looked out upon the night. It was dark and tempestuous ; black clouds were hurrying across the sky, and a star or two looked sadly through them, like the little bright eyes that used to love him. A flurry of snow swept against the window ; and he said to himself, though his mind misgave him as he spoke, "It is lucky that I'm not out to-night. I feel the cold now more than I did when I was younger. I shall sleep soundly in my bed, instead of rampaging about the country on a fool's errand."

He left the window, and returned to the fire, replenishing it with logs, till it filled the whole room with its cheerful blaze ; and still he felt

ill at ease. He lighted his pipe, and sat comfortably down again, with a tankard of foaming ale and a capital supper of beefsteaks and Christmas pie on the table before him; but he had no appetite; nothing seemed to give him any enjoyment; and at last he stole off to bed, feeling quite conscience stricken, like a man who knows his duty, but is not willing to perform it. "Now," thought he, as he tucked himself up snugly between two feather beds, and under half a dozen blankets, "I shall have a famous sleep, and forget the little brats that pester me so." But in vain he sought sleep, for the children still ran in his head. He had been so accustomed to travel on this particular night, that old habits were too strong, and he was excited and restless. All night he tossed and tumbled about, hearing all sorts of odd noises, and seeing little whimpering faces pictured on the darkness; and when, towards morning, he fell into a doze, he was awakened by a terrible nightmare, in which he fancied



that he was smothered under a great heap of toys, while all the children stood by laughing and making mouths at him. "See!" they said, "there is coward Santa Claus! Let him alone—he deserves his fate!" But it was really his own snoring and his uneasy conscience that disturbed him.

He rose, and, dressing himself in his usual droll costume, ate his breakfast with a very poor relish. He sadly hankered after the children, if the truth were told, and at last he could hold out no longer. "I declare I never had so dull a Christmas morning before," said he; "I believe I must go and look about me a little, and see if the little things miss me at all." Out he went, feeling very much embarrassed; for he had never been in the public streets by daylight before, and every one stared at him, while some rude boys would have mobbed him—such a Guy he was—if he had not, by means of a power he possessed, made himself invisible in a moment. So he went on, through the streets

of the queer old German city, just as the wonderful clock in the belfry chimed the hour of six, and its moving figures, Time with his scythe, the hours, the four seasons, and the three graces began their dance around its dial plate. He mounted very nimbly to the top of a house, for he could scramble like a cat, and walk like a fly on walls and ceilings, old as he was, and also, like some other spirits I have heard of, could look through the roofs of buildings as if they were of glass. He looked down into a large house where he had often been before, and where there lived some very great favorites of his. They had been sent to bed crying, last night, because there was no Christmas tree, and no toys, no books, no sugarplums, no Santa Claus. They had been looking forward to this day for months, and talking of it for weeks; and when the long-expected night came at last, it was — a blank! Their mother, herself sorely puzzled at the absence of Santa Claus, had been able to console them a very little with

the promise that he would come in the morning; and at last they sobbed themselves to sleep, and dreamed all night of dolls and rocking horses. They must have been the voices that he heard all the evening before, for his ears were preternaturally quick. But, alas! their dreams were their only consolation. They had hung up their stockings by their bedsides, in hopes that their good friend Santa Claus would fill them before morning; but, alas! though they waked very early, and flew to examine them, they were as empty as they had left them. So they had to fill them with their own little plump legs; and a welcome Christmas present they would have been to some gouty friends of mine.

"Merry Christmas!" cried the youngest boy, as he popped up his curly head from a heap of bedclothes, the last one to awake to disappointment.

"I won't say Merry Christmas—it's *not* a merry Christmas at all!" said little Alice.

"Where *can* Santa Claus be? He's an ugly, naughty Santa Claus!" cried all the children in chorus.

Then they ran down stairs, in hopes they should find something for them there; but there was nothing in the dining room but the great empty Christmas tree that their mother had prepared for Santa Claus to fill; not a garland, not a gift was upon it. They all began to cry in chorus, and their mother could not comfort them.

Just then Santa Claus looked in upon them, and his heart smote him as he saw the grief and disappointment of the little things. He tried to make light of it, however.

"Nonsense!" said he; "what signifies the whimpering of a few children? I'm sorry, however, that I did not gratify the poor little things; but it's too late now, and I'm not going to trouble myself about it. It's time I took a little care of myself. I'm growing old, and ought to attend to my own comfort a

little." As if he did not know that he was born seventy-five years old, and never could grow any older or younger, and that he was made and canonized for the sole purpose of making children happier! He knew very well like most other people, what he was created for, and what duties he had to perform, but he tried wilfully to shut his eyes to them. It seemed, however, as if there were tears of sympathy in those eyes, and he certainly blew his nose upon an enormous yellow pocket handkerchief in a very suspicious manner, and then took a pinch of snuff in great haste. The little darlings were pulling at his heartstrings in a way that made him nervous. Away he scrambled, however, and visited many other houses where children abounded, — homes of the rich and huts of the poor, — and from each there arose a wail of children mourning for their lost friend and their absent joys. He saw children of poverty, neglected wayside flowers, whose only pleasure was their Christ-

mas ; for poor indeed must be the home where *once* a year bright thoughts cannot enter. He saw the darlings of luxury, the nurslings of tender care and love, eagerly expecting the gifts and pleasures they were wont to share. On all the little faces was a look of bewildered disappointment, and "No Christmas! no Santa Claus!" was the cry in every house.

He was pierced to the heart. "Is it I," exclaimed he, "who have caused all these tears? What have I in the world to do? Should I have shrunk from taking a little trouble to bring joy to these little ones? Should they not have been sacred in my eyes? Selfish, good-for-nothing old fellow that I am! Santa Claus! Santa Claus! bestir your old stumps, and try to make amends for your neglect and shameful conduct." He sought his home again, thoroughly ashamed of himself for the laziness that brought sorrow to so many little hearts, that the day before were beating high with joyful expectation. He felt that he had de-

frauded others of their rights, and was no better than a thief in his own eyes.

All that week he was as busy as a bee ; and if any one could have looked into that old house, which no mortal has ever been able to enter, which stands in the most retired corner of the quaint town of Nuremberg, he would have beheld his odd figure bustling about, and his short legs trotting hither and thither, while he collected and arranged in huge sacks great piles of toys, apples, confectionery, and every thing good and beautiful that you can imagine. And when New Year's morning arrived, a cry of joy resounded over the whole city, and through many other cities and countries, and happy childish voices were heard to exclaim, " Santa Claus has been here at last — Santa Claus, the children's friend ! "

There never had been seen so splendid a display of toys and gifts ; there never had been known so merry and happy a day. And Santa Claus chuckled and laughed in his

sleeve to see their joy, and thought that he too had never been so happy in his life as now that he was with his dear children again. He looked on, and mingled, though invisible, in their sports, and resolved never again to neglect his duty. He had discovered that there is no happiness like that of making others happy, and never was known to spend a Christmas eve at home again.

"O papa, what a nice story!" cried Blossom.  
"Thank you — thank you, dear papa."

"Another — please tell us another," said George.

"O, not to-night, my darlings," said mamma.  
"One at a time. To-morrow night I will tell you one; but it is bedtime now."

"Another, just as good as that, and as long?"

"Yes — a very pretty nice long story. Good night, Blossom. Good night, George."



The children lingered as long as they could over the good-night kisses ; but at last there was no more to be said, and off they ran, talking, as they went up stairs, about papa's story.

## CHAPTER IV.

## MAMMA'S STORY.

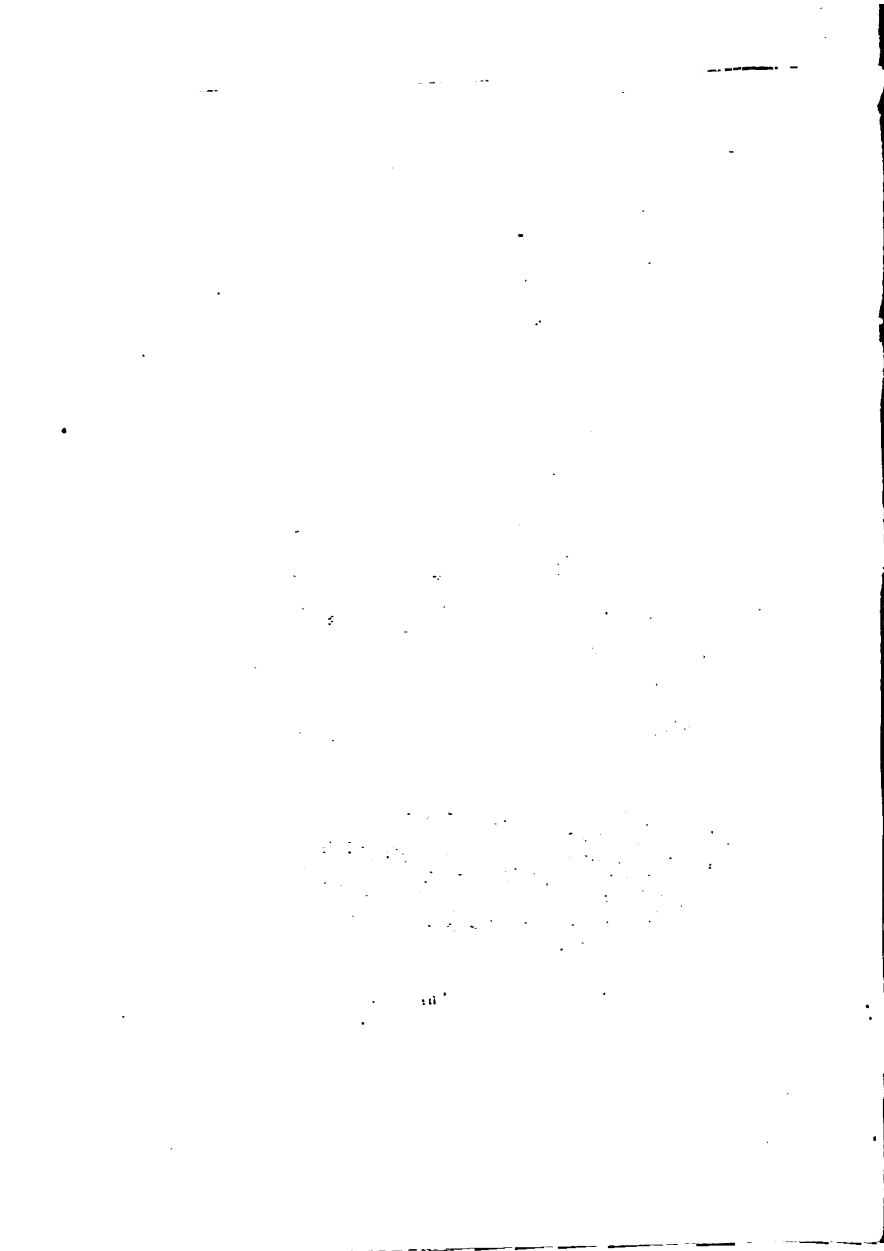
THEY had a grand frolic in the playroom the next evening. It had rained all day; the snow, which was not very deep after all, had entirely disappeared, and a dreary surface of mud and wet covered the ground. The trees and bushes were hung with raindrops, and no one could go out. But what matter was that to the merry party within doors? In music and pleasant talk the hours had sped quickly by, and now it was late in the afternoon. Blossom had taken her uncles and aunts into the playroom, to show them her baby house, and there by degrees they had all been drawn into a game of romps. Uncle Will outstripped them all, however, in jumping over tables and chairs; and he and uncle George enacted the





The Frog and the Water Nymph.

[illegible]



the Ravels, to the children's great delight. They played battledoor and graces, and a variety of merry games, till they were quite tired. Then Blossom suddenly bethought herself of the story that they were to hear from mamma, and they all went down stairs to ask her for it.

By that time it was quite dark without, though the lamp was not lighted ; for the fire shone brightly, and gave quite light enough to tell stories by.

"We are all ready, mamma," said Blossom.

"And so am I," said mamma ; "and my story is called

#### THE FRIGHTFUL FROG.

In a clear spring, at the foot of an old oak tree, lived a great ugly speckled frog. He was really a hideous creature, at least so *he* thought, as he sat on a mossy log, and looked at the image of his form in the water below.

And certainly he would have appeared very ugly to all but those who can see beauty and adaptation in all the works of God — who can find wonders in a worm, and charms in a fungus, and reasons for astonishment and adoration in the least of the twinkling stars. He had great goggle eyes, that projected a long way from his head, his figure and motions were sprawling and awkward, and his dress was a dingy brown speckled with a greenish hue ; while his voice was a loud and discordant croak, harsh even for a frog. Indeed, he was so much uglier than frogs in general, that he had never been able to persuade any young lady frog to become his mate ; and, disappointed and weary of the world, he had retired to this lonely spot, where he lived a hermit's life among the moss and water plants that bordered the spring. Yet within his hideous body there dwelt a soul as good and beautiful as belonged to the gayest butterfly, or loveliest-plumed bird, that ever visited his quiet haunt.



He was very humble and modest, having so low an opinion of his merits, and so deep a sense of his deformities, as to make him very melancholy. He was the more unhappy because his whole heart was penetrated with a love of the beautiful and a worship for all that is good and lovely, and deeper every day grew his sense of the contrast between his own frightful form and the exceeding beauty of all that surrounded him. The spring that he had selected for his home was a clear round well, that bubbled forth at the foot of a great oak tree, whose twisted roots guarded it round on every side. A little rill ran from it through the forest, sparkling, dancing, and prattling to him all the day, now hidden from his sight by rocks and fallen trees covered with moss, and now peeping at him from behind the angle of a great stone or an overhanging bank. It was his best companion, and seemed to sympathize with him in all his moods. When he was cheerful and bright, and betrayed, by the

glory of a summer's day, to forget his melancholy a while, the brook would seem as gay as he, and flash back an answering smile if he looked at it or spoke to it; but when a lead-colored sky hung over the landscape, and its lustre and life seemed departed, then the brook seemed to steal mournfully along with a complaining sound, as if it had some sad story to tell which it could not keep to itself. The sensitive soul of this poor frog was so exquisite in its sensibilities, that it had sympathy and love for all nature. A beautiful, smiling country lay sloping to the southern sun, below the hillside; and as the spring was near the forest's edge, he could look down upon it between the tree trunks, and see a bright river, fringed with alders, winding through it, towards which the brook was hastening. Behind the spring the hill rose very high, thickly wooded with dark pines, which protected it from the north winds which were sometimes heard sighing among their branches.

Thus this little spot was the most sheltered and pleasant for many miles round. Here the first spring violets always opened, the grass soonest grew green, and the color came back earliest into the face of nature. Here the first tender green of the forest trees showed itself, and the bluebirds and song sparrows were heard long before they thought of uttering a note elsewhere. Insects, too, left their hiding-places before the season, and buzzed about in the sunshine of this pleasant spot, and the butterflies hovered soonest over the early flowers. It was selected, too, by birds of sweet song for their nests and love making; and in the brook a few trout still lingered, and might be seen glancing to and fro, while their shadows darted over the bottom of the stream, followed by rippled reflections from the disturbed water. Here this lonely creature dwelt; and year by year his quick sense and yearning love of beauty increased, and the loveliness around him grew into his heart, and

became his life. And more and more was he sorely troubled with a sense of his own ugliness, and want of harmony with these fair and glorious things; yet he loved the lights and shadows, and fair forms in wood and meadow, none the less, but rather the more, because their beauty was to him so unattainable.

But most of all he loved the clear spring that was his home, and would sit for hours gazing at the bright sand that lay at the bottom of this forest well, through which the water was forever bubbling, and throwing it up in little jets—at the shadows of the floating clouds that pictured themselves in it—and at the faces of the flowers that bent over the brim, and seemed to nod and look up at themselves and him from its depths. He would sit, with an earnest and silent enjoyment in his heart, upon his favorite mossy log, gazing at these lovely things, or watching the flickering shadows upon the grass, till, catching a reflection of his own hideous figure, he would

give a mournful croak, and hop slowly away in self-abasement. In winter he curled himself up in the warmest nook he could find, and slept away his troubles, and forgot his ugly self; but sometimes a ray of warm sunshine would tempt him from his hiding-place, and reveal to him the beauty and glory of winter. The hoar frost glistening in the morning sun, the frozen soil raised by a miniature "Giant's Causeway" of little ice pillars in long colonnade, or the heavy wreaths of melting snow that hung from the dark pines, the pure carpet that was spread over the wide country side, and the delicate tracery and "fine hanging gardens" that surrounded the spring, filled him with exquisite delight. And then, again, haunted by his own deformity, he would exclaim, "Ah, why, when all is so beautiful, am I a foul blot on the face of nature? Alas! I am unworthy a higher place in the creation than this; and my sense of what I might have been only tortures me, and my love of beauty

but serves to make my pain and loneliness the keener. Would that I were the humblest bird or insect, with a form less frightful than mine. But beauty has been denied me because the lovely are alone worthy of the gift of loveliness." He was becoming a prey to morbid melancholy,—this poor frog,—yet it was not discontent, but a deeper and purer feeling that moved him thus. In truth, he was too much alone, and held too much converse with his own thoughts. He sadly wanted a friend, and never ceased to gaze into the spring, because there alone he seemed to find companionship and comfort. Birds and insects flitted to and fro upon their own business, and cared not for him; but there was ever a kindliness in the aspect of the clear little well, and it amused him and whiled away his weary hours to watch the restless motion of the sand and bubbles at the bottom.

Once, as he was sitting there as usual, and feeling more than ever the yearning of love

and loneliness in his heart, he thought or he dreamed that he saw the glance of a pair of bright ethereal eyes in the spring. It was but for a moment, and he saw them no more, though he watched for them many hours, and thought of nothing else the whole day. "It must have been a dream," said he, rubbing his eyes; but the more he thought of it the more was he convinced of the reality of the strange, startling glance that met his as he looked far down into the water. The next morning he again took his station on the brink, and looked into the spring; but hour after hour passed away, and he saw nothing but the shadows from the clouds and swaying boughs overhead, the flowers nodding at themselves, and the ever-moving sand. "Alas! it was, then, an illusion!" thought he, and turned sadly away; but giving one backward glance as he went, lo, the eyes shone out again bright and clear from the water, and again vanished before he could spring back to his seat. "It was no

dream," thought he ; and a feeling of awe came over him, for he knew that he had seen a spirit!

Henceforward the spring was no longer lonely ; all his thoughts were absorbed in its mysterious inhabitant, and he passed his whole time in watching for a glimpse of those spiritual eyes, in whose glances lay his whole happiness. As time went on, many such glimpses were vouchsafed to him ; and although the play of the water often deceived him, yet surely a golden tress would sometimes gleam through the water, and a pair of deep-blue eyes—surely they looked kindly on him—would tremble in the trembling wave ; and then eyes and tresses would melt away, and he would see nothing but a pebble at the bottom, surrounded by a quivering sunbeam. Thus months passed away, and oftener and still oftener he beheld these things, till his whole heart was absorbed in one wish—to behold the lady of the spring. "Then—then," cried he, "would my whole



soul be satisfied with a beauty beyond all that is earthly, could I but for once gaze upon this lovely spirit."

As he was thinking of these things, one warm summer's noon, and longing, in the deep stillness, as he was ever longing, he beheld an unusual agitation in the spring ; and, before he could still the beating of his heart, a creature of unearthly beauty rose slowly from the water, and stood before him. She had the same clear blue eyes and golden hair that he had so often gazed upon in the well ; her face was of ethereal loveliness, and her faultless form was veiled, yet not wholly shrouded, in a robe of mist. He shrunk behind a stone to hide himself and his ugliness from the presence of so much beauty, and then gazed as he would gaze forever. But not long was the vision allowed to his sight. She sunk slowly back again into the spring ; and when he at last dared to follow her to the brink, no trace of her could be seen in the water. A coming

tempest roared in the more distant forest, a dark cloud had rolled over the sky, the first mutterings of a thunder shower were heard, and large drops of rain fell into the spring. The world looked very dreary to the poor frog, and he felt more desolate than ever. Still time passed on, and he had but a few glimpses of the lovely water nymph ; but these glimpses were his life. But the more he loved her the more he felt his own unworthiness to appear in her sight, and the more he regretted his gross, unwieldy form, his bloated, discolored skin, and his discordant voice, and would shrink into himself whenever she appeared. Yet those unearthly eyes seemed ever to look kindly upon him, and once she smiled a shadowy yet meaning smile, as he saw her face surrounded by her golden-gleaming hair at the bottom of the spring. At last, when autumn came, she would often be seen, in the soft Indian-summer days, rising from the well, and sporting about in the many-colored shadow of the trees, adding

the grace of motion to her surpassing loveliness, while the trembling frog watched, but dared not approach her.

But one morning, when, after flitting a while in the sunshine, she sat upon a mossy cushion that covered the great root of the oak tree, and bathed her white feet in the spring, he could restrain his ecstasy no longer. Forgetting who and what he was, he sprang towards her, and sunk panting at her feet. But scarcely had he touched the hem of her robe than a strange thrill passed over him, and he felt himself changed and transfigured. He cast a hasty glance into the spring, and beheld himself as beautiful as the lovely being beside him! His soul had at last found a fitting habitation, his lonely heart a companion. She had looked into that good, loving, and humble heart; she had loved what she had seen there, and had bestowed upon him beauty such as he had little dreamed of, deeming it all he needed to make him worthy of her. She gave him

her hand, and they both disappeared beneath the bubbling sand. But on balmy spring days, in still summer noontide, and in the golden afternoons of October, they have been seen sporting together by the side of that lonely spring ; and I myself have fancied, as I looked into its depths, that I caught the glance of a pair of bright eyes, and the splendor of a tress of golden hair, as I watched the ceaseless play of the water.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE FAIRIES.

"WAS not your story a little too deep for Blossom?" said papa.

"Possibly, yet I think not. At any rate, I would rather that it should be above than beneath her comprehension. I think that children's stories are often too commonplace and matter-of-fact; and that it would be well to have a little more of fancy and poetry mingled with them, to elevate and refine their little minds while they can be easily moulded. It will make them happier all the rest of their lives, depend upon it, if they learn when children to love beauty, nature, and poetry."

"I believe you; for I know it well, from the effect that such lessons had upon my own heart when a child."

"The principal lesson to be learned from this story, my dear Blossom," said aunt Emily, laughing, "is, that men always look in the glass, even at the most agitated moments."

"Don't mystify the child. See how puzzled she looks."

"Mamma," said Blossom, "that was a beautiful story. Do you think I could ever see a water nymph? Did you ever see one? and how did it look? Did *you* ever see one, uncle Will?"

"Too many questions at once, my little Blossom. Yes, I did once see a water nymph; but how she looked I do not intend to tell you. But next summer, if you will go to the spring at the foot of the hill, or to the mill pond, or one of those pools in the brook, and then and there look into the water, I dare say you will see something very like one."

"O, I wish it were summer now," said Blossom. "No, I don't; for then it wouldn't be Christmas, and there would be no sliding, or

snowballs, or sleighing either. I like winter best, after all."

"Hush — listen, Blossom!" said aunt Emily.

A long-drawn sigh, followed by a complaining sound, between a groan and a pleading murmur, seemed to proceed from the core of a large log of wood that lay on the fire.

"What is that?" said Blossom, listening eagerly.

It went on, every moment becoming more mournful, till suddenly something seemed to burst asunder — puff! snap! and all was still, while a little cloud of smoke rose up the chimney.

"What was it?" said George, with his eyes wide open.

"It was a little sprite," said aunt Emily, "that a cruel witch shut up within a tree, so that he could not get out again. The tree grew tall and strong, and budded in many a spring, and glowed with golden light in many an autumn, and waved its bare branches,

winter after winter, against the cold, snowy sky ; and still the poor little sprite, once as merry as you, Blossom, was confined there as in a coffin. Sorely pinched he was for room ; and very sad it was for him, in the long summer nights, to hear his brother and sister fays at their frolics, as they rode about on the backs of bats to hunt fireflies and moths, or played bo-peep among the heavy foliage of the great tree where he lay. But they could not help him ; and the stars, that looked down upon him with their pitying eyes, were too far off to aid him. They grew dim in many a transparent dawn, while the birds awoke and seemed to mock him with their free songs, from their nests close by, and the bright sun and the glad day came once more to make him feel again how sad was his captivity. If you, my little pranksome Blossom, would hate to be shut up in the trunk of a tree, how much more a little sprite, who used to frisk from Orion's belt to Cassiopeia's chair, as you would



jump across the brook, and who could have thought nothing of riding on a flash of lightning from here to the north pole in a second. To such a free life was he accustomed, that it was torture to the little fay to be so confined, to say nothing of the pain he suffered. But he bore it bravely—as bravely, in his quiet way, as Prometheus, of whom papa will one day tell you, bore ‘his vulture and his rock.’ At last, after many, many years of sorrow, he heard one day some woodcutters, who passed through the forest, talk of felling the tree. You can easily imagine what a welcome sound it was to him. ‘Liberty—liberty!’ cried he; ‘now, at last, I shall be free!’ And his heart leaped for joy.

“The next day the men came again, and soon stroke after stroke resounded through the forest, and the great old tree rocked and quivered as though a tempest was raging among its branches. They plied their blows amain, until the growth of centuries was severed, and the

great tree bowed, wavered, and fell with a great crash upon the greensward. The frightened squirrels scampered far away; the poor little birds fled from their ruined nests and broken egg shells; but our little prisoner was not yet free—no! though the tree was dismembered limb from limb, sawed into logs, and actually sold for firewood. The curse of the old witch was still upon him. For months yet the log lay on the wood pile, and he was still shut up in it, though now with better hopes of escape; and at last, this evening, the fire has set him free. How he rejoiced when the great hickory log was rolled into the fireplace, and began to kindle, and sputter, and glow! How impatient he grew, as the hour of freedom drew nigh, until he could hold out no longer, and broke out into murmurs and cries! And then, with a burst and a spring, he broke his bonds, and flew up the chimney and away, to join his brother fays, and be glad and happy forever."

"And will the old witch never get him again?" said Blossom.

"No — never. Her power is at an end."

"How glad I am! Did you see him when he went up the chimney?"

"No, I did not see him; but I heard him. He darted off so quickly that no one could see any thing but smoke; but I heard a sound, like the whirring of a humming bird, as he flies past you."

"How many years was he in the tree, aunt Emily?" said little George.

"Just seventy-nine years; but now it is ended, how he must be enjoying himself!"

"But will he not be cold up in the snow clouds now?"

"No, he feels neither cold nor heat. He likes to play among the falling snow flakes even better than you do."

"Please, aunt Emily, tell us another fairy story."

"Not to-night, darlings, for mamma says it

is bedtime ; but to-morrow night I will. Now, a kiss, my little sprites, and off to bed as quickly as the fairy flew up the chimney just now."

A shower of kisses were bestowed on the little fairies. You could hear them, for some minutes, popping off like champagne corks ; and then away danced the light feet. You could hear them pattering in the hall, climbing the staircase, running about overhead for a while ; and then all was still, save the rain that beat against the window, and the cold wind that shook and rattled the blinds.

The next morning a glorious sight met the eyes of the children, when they first looked out. The rain had frozen in the night, and every branch and twig was covered with clear ice, that glistened in the beams of the rising sun like diamonds and gems of every hue. The world really looked like fairy land, or the wonderful garden of Aladdin, where precious stones grew upon the trees instead of fruit. You may

easily believe that the children were soon out upon the crisped and frozen grass, full of excitement at the wondrous change that one short night had brought forth. They came running in, with great icicles in their hands, which they wanted every body to taste, and blades of dry grass, beautifully incrustated, to show to mamma. By the time noon came these glories were fast disappearing; and ere night the world again wore its usual looks, and forgot how lately it had been a fairy land. It began to grow cold again, and George's hopes of skating revived.

"And now, aunt Emily, for the fairy story," said Blossom, as they all gathered round the fire at twilight. "But O, stop a moment! I left my doll on the piazza; and the poor thing will be quite frozen to death by morning. Will you please come with me to get her?"

Out she flew, without waiting for an answer; and aunt Emily followed, to look upon the

beauty of the night. The doll was soon recovered without injury; but so brilliant was the moonlight, that they lingered a while in the cold, frosty air.

"Do you hear *that*, Blossom?" said her aunt, as a sweet whispering sigh was heard in the branches of a pine tree that stood near."

"Those little, slender leaves seem to me as if they were harp strings, aunty, for the fairies to play upon."

"And how pleasant it is, Blossom, that we have their music in winter, when the brook is fast asleep, and we cannot hear the singing of the birds or the fluttering of the summer leaves, or the other sweet sounds of nature! But look up through that leafless elm, little girl, and I will show you something beautiful. Do you see how the moon shines along the edges of the little twigs around her face, in slender threads of light so delicate as to look like silver cobwebs? Did you ever see that before?"

"O, how pretty!" said Blossom, almost dancing with delight. "I never saw any thing half so pretty. Are they real cobwebs?"

"O, no; the moon makes them by shining on the twigs. She is behind them, and so only silvers the finest edge possible on the side that we can see."

"It seems as if the fairies had been there too."

"The fairy of Beauty is every where, Blossom, touching every thing with her magical fingers. Come in now, and I will tell you about her."

In danced our gay little Blossom again, with eyes as bright as moonbeams, and a nose nicely reddened by Jack Frost's fingers; but nothing would serve her but that George, and mamma, and every body should come out and see the cobwebs, and listen to the fairy harps; and so by degrees the whole family were assembled on the piazza, where so glorious a moonlit landscape lay before them, that it was some minutes,

in spite of the cold, before all were in the parlor again, and ready for aunt Emily's story.

You must know, my darlings, (said aunt Emily,) that fairies are not quite immortal, as some people suppose, but only live for many hundreds of years. After living a long time, they die, and ascend, like human beings, to a higher state of existence. It happened, therefore, that, after reigning happily and gloriously for many centuries, the Fairy Queen found that old age was creeping fast upon her, and that it was time to appoint a successor. There were three noble ladies of the kingdom, to whom, as next heirs to the crown, the fairy law gave the preference, upon one of whom the choice was to fall, if the Queen and her council thought them worthy of so high a place as the best benefactress of mankind — for such a fairy and a Fairy Queen should be. They were accordingly summoned before a council of the realm, without being told where-



fore, and were then required to give an account of the way in which each of them had passed her time that day. And let me tell you that fairies always speak "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;" and if one of them dared to do otherwise, the insight of the rest would immediately perceive it, and she would be expelled forever from the kingdom.

"What hast thou done for mankind to-day?" said the Queen to the first fairy, who had a face most lovely to look upon, and wings made of the rainbow.

"I have been trying to add a charm to every thing I touched, that poor human beings might always have something lovely to look upon. I taught the mist that rose this morning from the little watercourses in the valleys to wreath itself into more graceful forms, and to make little rainbows among the dewy leaves, and to lie upon the hillsides like the last snow that the sun of March leaves lingering there. And

I added a ray to the sparkling dewdrops, and sweeter notes to the song of the lark and the wood robin, and touched each flower as it opened with new tints, and little strokes here and there, that made it glow with new beauty. And as the morning mist rolled away, I tinged the sky with a deeper blue, and added a new richness to the sunlight, till all rejoiced in the glory of God's day. All over the world I followed the sunrise, and lighted up the morning with more gladsome beams; and wherever I flew, men said, 'Surely never was there a lovelier morning seen. It seems fresh from paradise.' Then I bade good by to the morning, and soared about in the stillness of the night. I blew with my breath the mist away from the stars, that they might shine out in full glory from the deep blue above, and made the planets tremble in the twilight with a lustre more than their own. I sent the aurora shooting upwards to the zenith, illuminating the sky with arches, pillars, and tremulous clouds of

light; and I taught the meteors to glance, and the fireflies to dance, and the waves of the sea to be liquid with phosphorescent light. I made the moon weave silver cobwebs in the trees, and light up the most prosaic things with romance and beauty by her supernatural light; and at my touch the leaves of the pine forest became a thousand harp strings, that were swayed into music by the breeze. Thus I have been about the world to make it more beautiful, that I might add to the happiness of mankind, and cause them to glorify the Creator of all."

"Well hast thou done, good and faithful servant," said the Queen, bowing her head towards the beautiful fairy, and feeling much inclined to give the kingdom to one who could thus bless mankind. "But what hast *thou* done, bright spirit?" said she to the next fairy.

This spirit had golden-gleaming wings, and a noble, glowing face; and though she was not quite so beautiful as the last one, yet her

glorious dark eyes seemed to pierce through every thing.

"I have endeavored," said she, "to shed into the dark mind of man the great gift of knowledge. I have been among savage nations, teaching them to subdue rude nature, and to learn the arts that soften and civilize. I have been with more enlightened people and nations, striving to infuse a love of knowledge and true greatness into their souls. I have taught them great ideas, and expanded their minds with a love of peace and patriotism. I have led them to make wonderful and useful inventions, and sown the seeds of a sublime progress in wisdom. I have infused taste into one mind, and into another sentiment. I have given the power of genius to one, and to another a thirst for knowledge, and have thus endeavored to make man great and glorious, that he may thus fulfil the purpose for which he was made, and shine forth in his Creator's image." Her face shone with a noble pride as she spoke.

and the Fairy Queen thought that she would govern wisely.

The third fairy was not so striking in her appearance as the two others ; but there was something in her face that seemed almost angelic, so heavenly was the look of love and goodness in her deep-blue eyes. Her wings were like a rose-colored cloud, and her smile was sweet, yet pensive.

"Where have you been to-day, young sister?" said the Queen.

"Among scenes almost too sad to tell you," said the fairy. "I have visited a prison where a miserable captive has been for years confined by a cruel king for some trifling offence, and whose hours have rolled tediously away, separated from all he loves best, in a living death, varied only by the visits of a savage jailer. His heart was ready to die within him ; but I whispered hope to the despairing, and taught him to look to God for comfort and support, to trust in Him, and to feel that,

however mysterious are his dealings with men, behind the veil will be a complete and perfect answer to all, when fears, and doubts, and tears, and partings shall be no more. I have been among the abodes of bitter, pinching poverty, and taught the sufferers courage, endurance, patience, and the faith that God loves us in spite of all, and only tries us here for a time, that our joy may be the more full hereafter. I have been with mourners for the dead, who could not be comforted because those whom they loved were removed from their sight into the grave, and they saw them no more, and taught them to feel that life is short, and separation but for a little while; that this world is not our home, and that in heaven reunion will be the sweeter for the pang of parting. I have been with the morbid, the bitter, the disappointed, who were ready to curse God and die, and have brought softening thoughts and melting tears, and stolen away the heart of stone, and given them a

heart of flesh. And I have been with those who struggled with keen, mysterious sufferings, doubts, and despair, till reason tottered to its fall, and have saved them, and brought them out of darkness into light. To all I have taught the same lesson—God is *love*; *God is love*; he does *not* afflict willingly nor grieve his beloved children. I have endeavored to sow peace and love among mankind, to loose the fetters of the slave and the oppressed, to strengthen charity, to brighten faith and hope, and to soften the heart of each man towards his neighbor, that thus the world may in time become the abode of a race with whom love may abound, and happiness be holy.”

As she spoke, her face was as the face of an angel, and tears glistened in the eyes of the Queen.

“Fairy of love and goodness,” said she, “thou art the most worthy to receive the kingdom.” Her council agreed with one voice, for all hearts were touched. But the fairies of knowl-

edge and beauty were made her prime ministers, because they too had greatly blessed mankind.

"Aunt Emily, I love the good fairy best," said Blossom. "I wish she would put such thoughts into my heart."

"She will, I trust, my little Blossom," said mamma. "If you welcome her, she will stay with you, and be your good angel. Good night."



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE WONDERFUL RAM.

THE next evening, Blossom happened to notice that, by the hands of the great clock in the corner, the hour for rest was not far off. The clock, too, seemed to know it; for it looked at Blossom with its great round face, and ticked "Bedtime! bedtime!" as loudly as possible.

"Almost eight o'clock," cried Blossom; "and we have not had one story yet. Uncle Will, it is your turn; please tell us a story; quick!"

"Why, Blossom, you do not give me time to make one. I shall have to tell you one that I know already, and a very old story it is."

"Well, that will do just as well, if it is a pretty one."

"Yes, yes," said George. "Do begin, please, uncle Will."

There once lived (said uncle Will) two lovely and good children, whose names were Phrixus and Helle. They dwelt in a beautiful palace of white marble, in whose courts and gardens grew the fairest flowers, where fountains sparkled, and snow-white doves fluttered their pure wings, and beautiful gazelles stooped to drink. Here, too, a noble ram, of great size, a magnificent creature, with golden fleece, wandered about at his own free will, revered and loved by all as the gift of Heaven. He was gentle and kind to the children, and they loved him well. In this pleasant place sported this happy brother and sister, with their kind mother Nephele, who spent her life in devising pleasures for them. Sometimes they would go wandering for hours in the dark, shady woods, or gathering flowers in the meadows, and playing with the young lambs, as innocent and

sportive as themselves, sometimes by the fountain's side, or seated at the foot of some ancient statue, their mother told them stories of giants, heroes, and monsters, and of strange creatures that lived in far countries, while they listened with fixed eyes full of wonder, and let fall their forgotten flowers. But alas! the years of childhood passed by, and these happy days began to hasten to a close.

Athemas, their father, either began to weary of his lovely wife, or else dark and unfounded suspicions took possession of his mind, for she was coldly dismissed from his side upon some paltry pretence. I need not tell you how her heart was torn, in thus being driven from her dear ones, in their tender youthful beauty, just as their early promise was beginning to reward her care and love. Their parting cannot be described, nor can I express the weary longing that filled those young hearts for many a day for a sight of their mother's face. And sometimes those longings were sat-

ified. If, in their woodland rambles, they strayed a little way from their protectors, they would sometimes be startled by the apparition of that dear and beautiful face, with disordered hair and tearful eyes, looking out from some neighboring thicket; and if those loving eyes saw that they were not observed, fond arms would strain the children to a faithful, loving heart, and passionate kisses would be exchanged, and tears mingled that flowed both for the joy of meeting and the agony of parting. You may be sure Nephele was never far from her little ones. But now worse trials awaited them; for a cruel step-mother was placed over the children, and, as time passed, she grew daily more suspicious of them, and hated them yet more and more. They never saw their dear mother now, though their hearts wept blood for her; they could never speak of her to cruel Ino. Only in dreams her kind face bent over them; only in slumbers they thought that her arms were round them, and

heard her kind voice telling them how she loved them, till they awoke, and found that all was dark, and she was not there. Then, in the stillness of the night, their pillow would be bathed with tears of loneliness and grief; for keen are childish sufferings ere the world has rendered callous the feelings and hardened the heart, or time has given strength and patience to the soul that endures to the end. Still they were not quite miserable, for they had each other; though their persecutions increased more and more, and cruel blows and unkind words were their daily portion, and they were treated with roughness and neglect, instead of the cherishing, fostering care they once knew so well. The strong frame of Phrixus endured this hard usage without shrinking; but he saw his little sister droop, and feared that the child would die, and he be left alone. Ino saw it with joy; for she had children of her own, and it vexed her proud heart that they should not succeed to the kingdom.

Her heart grew harder and harder towards them every day, till at last she determined that they should no longer stand in her way, and sought means to kill them. Her cherished hate and ambition had brought forth their deadly fruit. But Nephele watched her narrowly from her hidden retreat, and a mother's quick fears warned her of the threatening danger. As she was one day earnestly thinking how she might save her children, she was suddenly aware of a bright spot in the sky.

It came nearer and nearer, and, behold! the well-known form of the beautiful ram with golden fleece descended and stood by her side.

"Nephele," he said, "I am the son of an Immortal One, and am sent by Heaven to save your children from their cruel bondage."

She started not, though the noble animal spoke; for such marvels were more common in those times than at present, and she knew him well, for in her happy days he had dwelt, honored and beloved, in her husband's palace,

and been almost worshipped as its guardian genius. She threw herself at his feet, and besought his aid, as her only friend.

"Fear not, but instantly follow me," said he. "To-morrow would have been too late."

He led the way through wood paths that Nephele well knew ; for she had often stolen through them to meet her children, or had wandered with them there in times gone by, and every rock, and tree, and sunlit glade reminded her of them. She glided along with stealthy steps, starting at every sound, for she well knew how much was at stake. She soon came to a deep and lonely dell, where high rocks, black with pines and twined with climbing plants, overhung a wild, impetuous brook, that fretted and murmured over the rocks and stones that lay in its way. And in a spot of deepest shadow, where the sun never shone, sat Phrixus, with his arms folded, gazing moodily into the stream. He was a noble-looking youth, just starting into manhood, on whose

brow always hung a shade of thought too deep for his years, which to-day was darkened into melancholy and gloom. Near by, sweet, gay little Helle, in the first joyous years of maidenhood, ere childhood's sportiveness has passed away, had forgotten her sorrows for a while, and was carelessly swinging upon a grape vine that hung from the branches of a pine, while she wove a garland for her hair, and sung a merry song of old times. They were alone for one moment, unwatched and unattended, for the spoiler was too sure of his prey to guard it closely. A rustling in the bushes was heard. Phrixus sprang up alarmed to his feet ; his eye flashed, and his hand sought a hidden weapon to defend his sister, when the beloved form of his mother appeared from behind the mass of gray rock under whose shadow he stood. Her eye met his ; they understood one another.

“My son, have you heard the news I bring ?”



"I have, mother, and am resolved to sell our lives as dearly as possible."

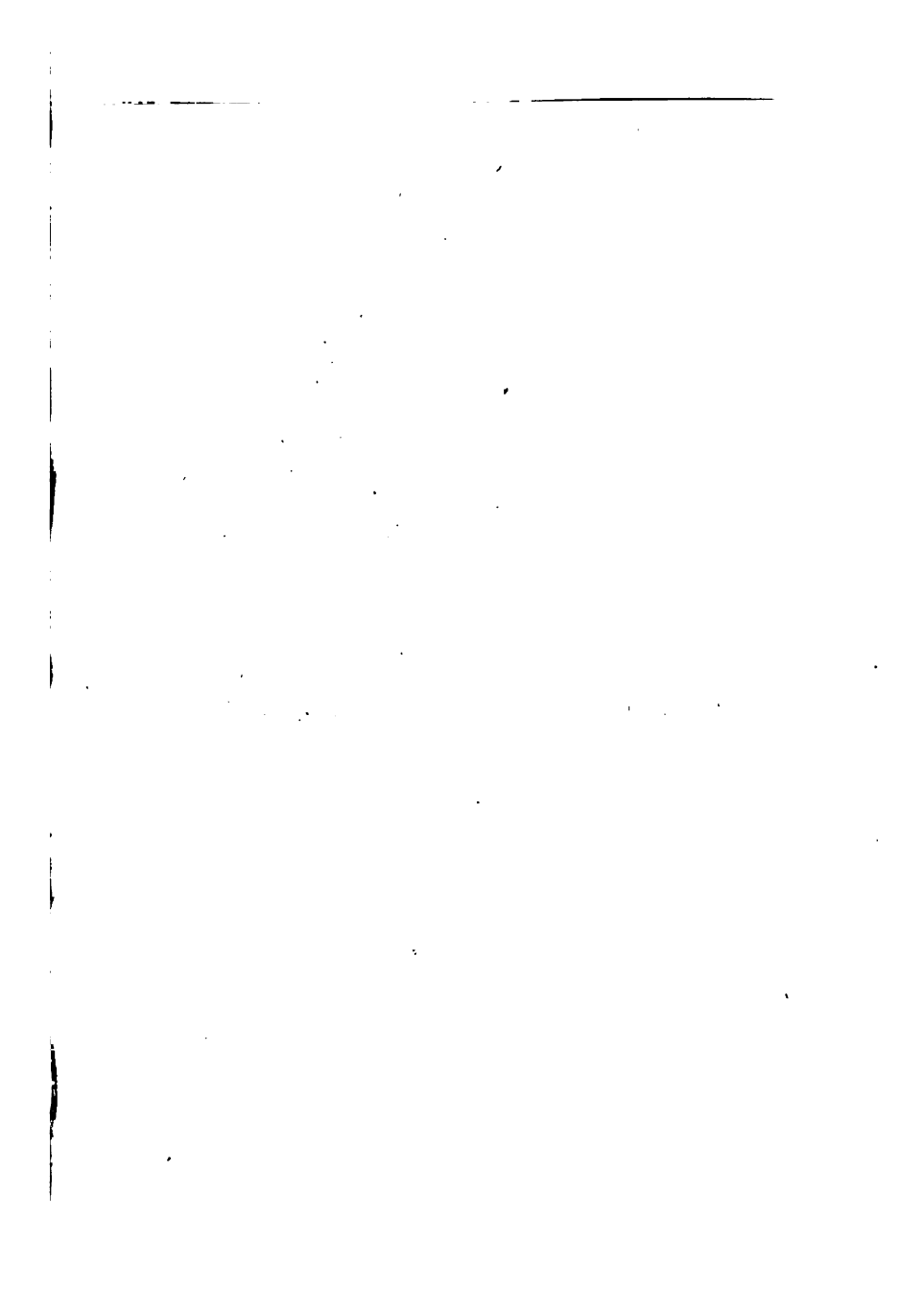
"There is no need, Phrixus. Behold the friend whom Heaven has sent to aid your flight!"

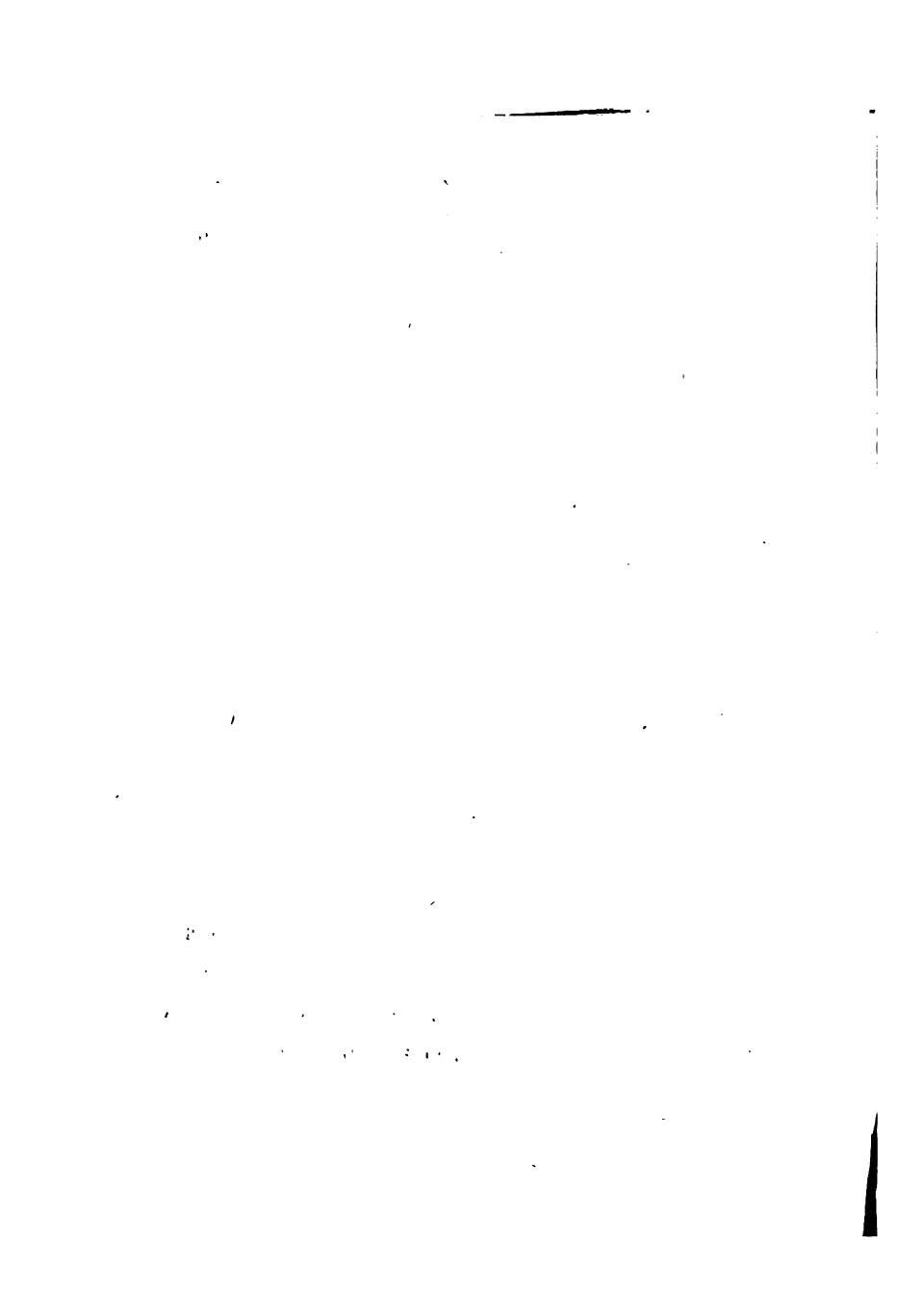
When Phrixus saw the well-known form, a look of joy darted to his eyes; he threw his arms around his neck, and buried his face in the curls of his golden fleece. Many a time, in his happy boyhood, had he gambolled with this dear old friend in the gardens of his father's palace. Often, mounted on his back, had he galloped safely and airily over the tops of the highest trees, and felt the free air rushing past him, as he enjoyed a bird's flight and a bird's-eye view of the world below.

"Listen, my son," said Nephele. "Mount quickly, with Helle, and trust yourself to the guidance of this kind friend. Hasten, or danger will overtake you. One last embrace! To me it is despair to part with you; for something in my heart forebodes sorrow, and tells

me that I shall see your young faces no more. But hasten — save yourselves! Mount, and ride for your lives!”

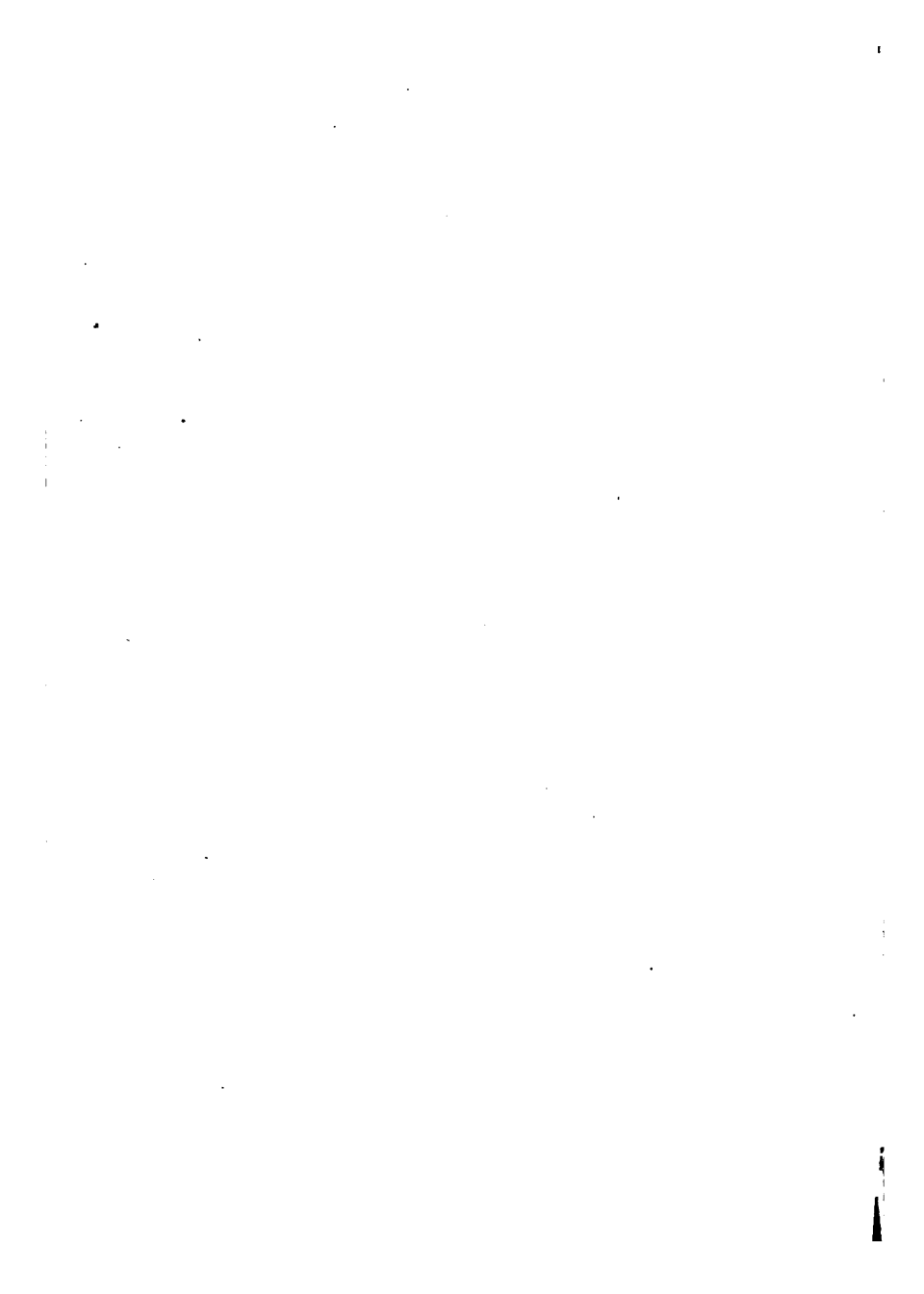
Phrixus tore himself and Helle from his mother's arms. Helle, weeping she scarce knew why, smiled through her tears at the thoughts of a ride through the sky, and gladly mounted behind her brother. Up and away they darted, and Nephele followed them with straining eyes, till the golden fleece and the snow-white dress were lost in the blue sky, and then sank upon the ground and wept. Hours passed by, and the sun set, and the full moon rose in the serene heavens, and still Nephele lay weeping for her children, and could not be comforted. But when morning came, she was not there; but a beautiful cloud, tinged with rose color by the beams of the rising sun, hovered above, and wept soft dew upon the spot. Heaven had heard her despairing cry, and given Nephele this form, that she might follow her children and be always near them, lest she should







The Golden Fleece.



have wept herself to death on the cold ground in her misery. And lo! a rainbow, born of her tears, hung upon the edge of this wonderful cloud, and lighted it up with glory.

But Phrixus and Helle were now far away, flying with the speed of the wind over hills and valleys, cities and rivers; and Phrixus strove to cheer and amuse his young sister by pointing out to her the wonders of the lands over which they passed. And truly it was a delightful way of seeing the world, to soar, like the birds, in the fresh morning air, and to enjoy the swift motion and rushing breeze high in the pure heaven. It was better than the railroad to the moon you so often wish for, George.

"Look, Phrixus," said Helle; "a bright and beautiful cloud seems to follow us. It must be a happy omen." But at the word the rain poured forth from its depths, lying in long, misty streamers across the clear sky.

"No, Helle. It weeps at your words, and

dark forebodings seize my heart. Speak not of it. See, yonder is the blue sea ; you have never before seen it. Is it not glorious ? And there, far away on its borders, is a great city gleaming in golden splendor."

Onward they sped ; and now they heard the hoarse murmur of the waves, as they broke at a far distance below. But, alas for Helle ! as she gazed down into the sea, fascinated with its beauty, she grew dizzy, lost her hold of her brother, and, ere he could snatch her from destruction, he beheld her falling swiftly through the air, heard her shriek to him for aid in vain, and, as he urged his course downwards from his great height towards the sea, saw her float for a moment, swan-like, upon the waves, sustained by her snow-white dress, saw her stretch out her arms towards him with a despairing cry, and beheld her — O, misery ! — his fair, golden-haired Helle, his only sister and friend — sinking in the deep sea. He sprang into the water, but it was in vain ; all



he could obtain from its grasp was her lifeless body. Laying it gently upon a sea-weed couch, he would have plunged into the cruel waves that had torn his sister from him, and sought death, in his grief and despair ; but a firm, invisible hand withheld him, and a grave but kind voice sounded in his ears. It was not his mother's voice ; it had not the love and tenderness of that tone he could never forget ; but it was solemn and sonorous, like that of some great and beneficent being, some kind protector.

"Phrixus," it said, "give o'er thy desperate grief, and be comforted. Thy sister awaits thy coming but a few years in the happy valleys of Elysium. Bury her loved remains, with holy prayers, upon this fatal shore, and then leave it, and trust thyself to my guidance. A short but glorious and happy life awaits thee in another realm, where thou wilt be gladly welcomed, and comforted with other love. Strive not against the inexorable fates."

Phrixus grew calm, and his grief ceased to

utter itself in wild cries of despair, as he listened to the low but authoritative voice. There seemed still a future for the ardent youth beyond the grave of Helle. He gave her solemn burial where the cruel waves could not reach her, where a cypress waved over a quiet little stream that slipped noiselessly down to the sea, and, with earnest prayers, and another burst of bitter grief that would not be controlled, he mounted the golden ram, and bade a last farewell to his sister's lonely grave. The sun had set, and the gray hues of twilight were gathering around that melancholy shore as he bade it adieu. No sound was heard but the rustle of the cypress leaves, the shrill note of the tettix, and the breaking of the waves against a rocky shore. How that last sound brought a chill to his heart, as he thought of his lost Helle! As he looked backward, in departing, for a last glance at the grave of youth and beauty, and thought how one short and bitter moment had changed all the world

for him, he saw that dim and shadowy cloud hanging over the spot, its bright hues all faded, and pouring forth its tears once more, like long "dishevelled tresses," or the streaming leaves of the willow swayed by the wind. He could not speak ; he could only wave a mute farewell, and, laying his head upon the neck of the faithful ram, go forth into the gathering darkness.

All night he journeyed, in the solemn silence of grief that can find no utterance ; and the moon, sailing through the blue of midnight, and the clear stars, seemed to look upon him with pity, though they could not comfort him. But he heard again that grave, calm voice, in the stillness of the dawn.

"Look, Phrixus," it said, "there is thy home."

He looked down from his aerial height, and beheld below him, in the pure crystalline light, a great and magnificent city, whose towers and palaces already began to glow with the coming day. A green and smiling country lay

around it, where temples and gardens, groves and orchards, sprinkled the banks of a winding river that rolled to the sea, and far away mountains rose more and more blue and distant, till they were lost in the clouds.

"When the sun rises," said the voice, "thou shalt seek yonder temple that towers upward in the midst of the city, and there devote this ram, thy only remaining friend. Nay, repine not; for Heaven demands the sacrifice, and will reward thee for it. Place his fleece in the inmost shrine of the temple; it is a worthy gift. There thou shalt learn what thou art to do. New friends, dear and happy ties await thee. Go on, and prosper. Seven years of a blissful life are thine, and then thou shalt join Helle and thy mother in Elysium. The blessing of Heaven is upon thee. Go in peace. Farewell."

And Phrixus pursued his way, sloping his course downward towards the city, where the hum of busy life was just awakening.

The children had shed many tears during this recital ; and George proclaimed aloud that he did not like that story — there was too much “sorrowness” in it.

“But what became of Phrixus after that?” said Blossom.

“He went into the city ; and after obeying the will of Heaven, and taking leave of the Ram, with many tears, in the temple, where he saw him crowned with flowers and led to the shrine of Mars for sacrifice, he heard a voice which told him to repair to the palace of the king, and throw himself upon his protection. The king received him with great honor, as a noble young prince should be welcomed, and gave him his fairest daughter for a wife. There he lived for a long time very happily, and had children of his own, one of whom was a little girl with golden hair, who reminded him of his lost Helle. But at last the king, in his old age, grew avaricious, and became desirous of possessing the golden fleece ;

and, as Phrixus would not allow him to take it from its consecrated place in the temple of Mars, in his cruel tyranny he caused him to be murdered. It is said that he ever afterwards regretted it, and that remorse pursued him to his grave ; for Phrixus was a good and brave man, and had done many glorious deeds in his short life, and the king had loved him as a son, until he grew to love riches better, and, overcome by temptation, allowed himself to do this cowardly act. From that day his riches gave him no happiness ; and he felt no satisfaction in looking at the golden fleece, but put it away out of his sight. Phrixus was buried by the side of Helle, and a mournful rain cloud always hovers, weeping, over the spot."

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE BROOK'S DREAM.

"We are all ready for a story, uncle George," exclaimed the children, as he entered the room after a long walk in the winter twilight, his eyes winking from the sudden change from darkness to light.

"What, a story from me?"

"Yes — yes, indeed, uncle George. All have told us stories but you, and aunt Alice, and grandma," said Blossom, nestling by his side, with a coaxing look, while George tucked himself under the tails of his coat.

"Well, well; just let me take breath a little, and warm myself, and rub the dark out of my eyes, as George would say, and then I will tell you what the brook dreamed about last night. It seems that the brook finds it

rather dull, in winter, to be dozing away under the ice and snow, while we are all enjoying ourselves here ; and one day, having been awakened by a bright ray of sunshine that visited him at noon, he longed to get out and have a frolic—just as *you* might, Blossom, if you had been tucked up in bed for a month or so. But he tried in vain ; he could not get free from his icy bonds, and frisk about as if it were summer ; so he amused himself, in a discontented way, in fancying what he would do if he could only get out.

“ ‘O,’ thought he, ‘how charming it would be if I only had active limbs like a squirrel, or wings like a bird, that I might frisk gayly about, and see a little of the world ; or even if I were a cloud or a snow flake, that floats about in the air, and looks so peaceful and happy !’ Indulging these fancies, and soothed by the sighing of the winter wind, he at length turned over and went to sleep again ; though he thought he was awake all the time. He



fancied that he was given a bodily form, according to his wish, and was then caught up into the air, and whirled away, in a great storm of wind and rain, far off among the clouds, that he had so often gazed upon with admiration and envy, as they floated over him on a summer's day, casting their white shadows upon his bosom. So beautiful they looked to his distant gaze, that he had often longed to sail with them along the sky, or sleep folded in their soft embrace.

"But now all was changed. He found cloud land a very cold, wet place, as damp and uncomfortable as possible. Wild winds bounced him about, and knocked and banged him against great mist banks, where he sunk enveloped in dank fog. Then a torrent of rain washed him away, and dashed him against a meteor, which immediately exploded, singeing him horribly in its blaze, and tumbling him about with the great concussion it made, till he was lost in the blackness that followed. The thunder

roared like ten thousand earthly thunder claps rolled into one; the lightning blinded, bewildered, and frightened him, only serving to reveal the awful desolation of the scene; and at last he lay down upon the driest-looking piece of cloud he could find, hoping for a little rest. But the treacherous cloud gave way under him, and he sank farther and farther into its cold, moist depths, until at last he fell through, and still continued falling, falling for many minutes, which seemed to him as many hours.

“‘Ah,’ groaned he, ‘cloud land is not so pleasant a place as I fancied it to be. But, good heavens! where am I going to, and what *will* become of me now?’ Just at that moment he fell with great force upon a monstrous iceberg; and when he had recovered from the shock, which was as if he had been shot from a cannon upon a bed set with swords, daggers, pins, and needles, he sat up as well as he could, and looked around him. He could per-

ceive nothing on either side but a desolate region of ice and snow. Not a living creature, not a trace of vegetable life, was to be seen ; all was still, cheerless, and void, save where the aurora borealis lit the heavens with fire, and with its flame-like motion gave a wild grandeur to the scene ; and when the icebergs split their great masses in twain with a ringing sound, and the great ice fields ground and crushed together. 'I must be somewhere near the North Pole,' said the brook to himself, nearly freezing with cold. Yes, there was the North Pole itself close by him, incrustated with glittering ice, and rising upwards in the cold moonlight till it was lost among the stars. Now a bitter, icy wind began to howl, and brought with it whirling clouds of blinding snow, showers of needle-like ice, and torrents of hailstones as large as ostriches' eggs, which bombarded the poor brook till he was half dead. At last, such a terrible whirlwind of snow and tempest took him, that it bore him

fairly off his feet, and away over dreary wastes that its brethren had blighted, until, its fury spent, it dropped him where warmer seas bathed a kindlier shore. But that shore he was not destined to reach. The north wind, as if in spite, had let him fall just where the waves were deepest, and far away from shore, and then sped on its way, laughing in hollow mockery, to carry chill and misery to some other land. He sank and still sank in the sea, and pleasant was the yielding warmth of his kindred waves ; and he hoped, when he at last should reach the bottom, that there he might find rest and peace.

“How greatly was he mistaken! The bottom of the sea he found to be any thing but the quiet, peaceful place that it is represented to be. Great submarine rivers rushed forth with hollow sound from gaping caverns ; volcanoes poured out hissing streams of hot lava into the sea ; earthquakes shook the bed of the ocean ; the rocks were upheaved, and again

sunk in great gulfs, and the water dashed and roared in ceaseless agitation. Or did he fly from these terrors, and seek a calmer spot, there huge sea monsters sported in horrid joy, dragons and sea serpents opened their jaws as if to devour him, and all sorts of strange, slimy creatures twined their long arms and legs about him, impeding his way and inflicting cruel stings. He was cut by the sharp rocks and razor-like shells, and pursued by fierce sharks and dogfish, while the great waves stunned him with their violence, as they rose and fell, and dashed him to and fro against the rocks. Suddenly the whole horrid scene faded and fell away from his eyes, and he awoke to the bright beams of the morning sun, which pierced his icy covering in the spot where they lay the warmest, and there he was, himself again! in his snug rocky bed, with snow-white curtains around him, and the lullaby of the pine leaves again in his ears.

" 'How glad I am,' thought he, 'that it was

all a dream, and I am but a brook after all ! I will never wish to be a rover again. If such are the homes of my kindred waters, I shall never envy them again, or look with longing eyes towards cloud land.'

"So he quietly took another nap, going to sleep in a far more contented spirit than before ; and this time no troublesome dreams visited his bedside. He will sleep till the spring comes to give him life and liberty once more, so that he can go bounding down the hillside and along the meadow as merrily as ever."

"I always thought I should like to be a brook," said Blossom ; "they always seem to be so happy, and to be dancing and singing as they go along."

"Yes, they do indeed. They sometimes seem to leap for joy in the sunshine of a bright day, and again to glide quietly through shady nooks, as if they loved the cool shadow of the trees. A brook always seems a living thing."

"Did the brook tell you its dream this evening, uncle George?"

"Yes, this very night, as I was walking home through the woods, it whispered it very softly to me; and I took care to remember it for you and George."

"Are hailstones ever really as big as ostriches' eggs?" asked George.

"Very likely they may be at the north pole. But as no one has ever been there, I suppose we must take the brook's word for it."

"That was but a short story," said Blossom. "May we not have another to-night? There is plenty of time. May we, mamma?"

"Yes, my darling, if you can find any one who is willing to tell one for you."

Blossom did not look as if she thought that would be very difficult; for children who are reared in an atmosphere of love and kindness are ever confident of the good will of others.

"It is your turn next, aunt Alice," cried

she, stealing to her side, and holding up her face to be kissed.

"I am not much of a story teller, Blossom; but I cannot refuse my darling children. As we are upon the subject of dreams to-night, I will tell you one that I had last May."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## AUNT ALICE'S BIRDS.

It was one of those warm, drowsy days that we sometimes have in spring, when summer seems to have come before its time, and I had wandered into the wood with a book in my hand, and seating myself in the shadiest spot I could find, where the early foliage was thickest, tried to read. But who could read in the woods on such a day? The lovely hues and sweet sounds around me, the lights and shadows that waved and flickered about me, forbade any thing deeper than a reverie; and my thoughts continued to wander at will, until the song of the innumerable birds overhead, and the babble of the brook close by, caused a more and more dreamy feeling to steal over me, and at last I fell asleep. Yet I seemed to myself

to be wide awake still, and still seated under the tall trees, listening to the singing of the birds ; but then I was endowed with the power of understanding what they were saying, as they gossiped noisily over the pretty work of nest building.

"O, dear!" twittered a pair of little song sparrows ; "will this nest never be done, so that we can begin housekeeping? So many accidents have happened, that we have been a week about it, and not much more than the frame is up. We shall never move in at this rate. Suppose a storm should come to-morrow, and our nest not ready ; how nicely wet we should be, even supposing that the whole is not blown down! Do let us make haste. I am very glad we have no furniture to buy, else we should *never* be ready. That bit of moss is mine, you thievish chit of a wren! I took all the trouble to bring it here myself; and you had better let it alone, *I* can tell you. As for you, Mr. Woodpecker, you had better

not be throwing bits of bark at my head in that outrageous manner. If I *am* little, you need not think you can impose upon me."

"Tap, tap, tap!" said the woodpecker to his mate. "Come here and see what a splendid grub I have found in this hole. He looks quite fat and delicious. You shall have the head, and I will have the tail. Come—come—come!"

"Sensual glutton, cease!" cried a bluebird, who sat on the next bough, in great indignation. "Do not break the stillness of a day like this, which seems made for thoughts of love, hope, and happiness, with your grubbing into rottenness and decay. Listen to me, thou fairest and loveliest creature, who sittest on yonder bough, with the soft, round eyes, graceful form, and wings of the heaven's own blue! Long have I heard your sweet carol with delight, not daring even to twitter a note lest I should disturb you; now listen to my lay. Come, dwell with me, and be my mate! I

will build you a nest on yonder pendent birch tree, just where the fragrant blossoms will fall over your head, and fill all the air with their sweetness, as the breeze sways them to and fro, and where the network of twigs and tender leaves let in lovely glimpses of the sky. By the time that summer comes, I will train them so as to form a perfect bower, to shade you from the hot beams of the noonday sun. Below, the ground is carpeted for you with early spring flowers—the liverwort, the anemone, the dog-tooth violet, the dancing columbine, and violets—violets every where!—blue as your own fair wings. Do you not love flowers? The fragrance of the trailing arbutus steals up from beneath the withered leaves, and bright-red partridge berries gleam from yonder bed of emerald moss, meet food for that pretty beak. And, far away through that opening between the boughs, the ground is golden with the sunshine of buttercups and fivefingers, and white with innocence and straw-

berry blossoms — a gay garden for you, my love. Come, then, and let us be happy together in our snug little home, where the brook and the breeze join their melody to our voices. We will have plenty of music. We will sing songs together about the spring, the flowers, and the blue sky, and all the beautiful things we love, and join in concert with the other birds, till we make the old wood ring again. And sometimes, when we want amusement, or find the place a little dull, we will fly off to seek food, and visit other regions of the fair world we live in. Yonder, too, is a sparkling brook where we can bathe our wings, when we return tired from wanderings; and I know where the clear spring is to be found which is its source, where the purest water in the forest gushes forth for you and me."

The little bird listened with her head coquettishly turned on one side, and then, with a saucy shake of her wings and a toss of that pretty head, she flitted to another bough, and

yet another, peeping at him between the leaves with her bright little eyes. Now and then she would twitter a word or two in reply, and seemed to say,—

“No—yes—no! Well, I'll think about it—no, I'd rather not—well, perhaps I may, some time or other—time enough—‘I'm o'er young to marry yet.’”

And then she spread her wings, and flew quite away out of sight.

But he had carefully watched which way she went; and saying to himself, ‘Faint heart never won fair lady,’ he quickly followed her; and I could still hear their voices at a distance, love making in the deeper wood.

“What nonsense those children do talk!” remarked an old catbird, who had had half a dozen wives, to his last mate. “Young people are sadly altered now from what they were in the good old times when we were young. In my day, birds of that age were not allowed to go out alone.”

"It is very great folly, my dear ; but I'll tell you what provokes me more, and that is, to see how proud those stuck-up neighbors of ours, the robins, are of their new house, just because it happens to be big. As if there had never been a nest of that size before ! If they had seen an eagle's nest, as *I* have, they *might* talk ! I think it very ugly, for my part ; but they puff and swell, and sit near it, looking at it and chattering about it, as if it were the finest thing the world ever saw. For my part, I should say it was very badly built ; I could pull it to pieces in two minutes."

Near me, on a very old, trunk covered with moss and lichens, a pair of brown creepers were busily employed in searching for ants ; but their conversation was too commonplace to be worth repeating. It was all, from beginning to end, about eating. In fact, they were disputing rather noisily whether the leg or the wing of a beetle was the most delicate in flavor, and neither of them seemed likely to have

the last word for some time to come. I was very much amused, however, to hear a couple of last year's pewits talking about improvements in building.

"Don't you think," said one, "that nests might be built on some better plan than the old tiresome way in which every one has gone on for ages? For instance, how nice one would be made square, with partitions and a roof, so that one might have a room to one's self, and not always be shut up in the nursery. A few days ago I hopped into the nicest place you ever saw—it was a wren box in an apple tree, near a very pleasant garden. I was soon driven out by those quarrelsome, inhospitable wrens; but I have quick eyes of my own, and I took a pretty good look at the place. I declare it made me quite envious, it was so snug and complete; and ever since I have been trying to make out how we could build one like it."



"But how would you set about it?" said her more timid mate.

"I hardly know; but I've an idea in my head, if one could only get the materials, and persuade the neighbors to help us."

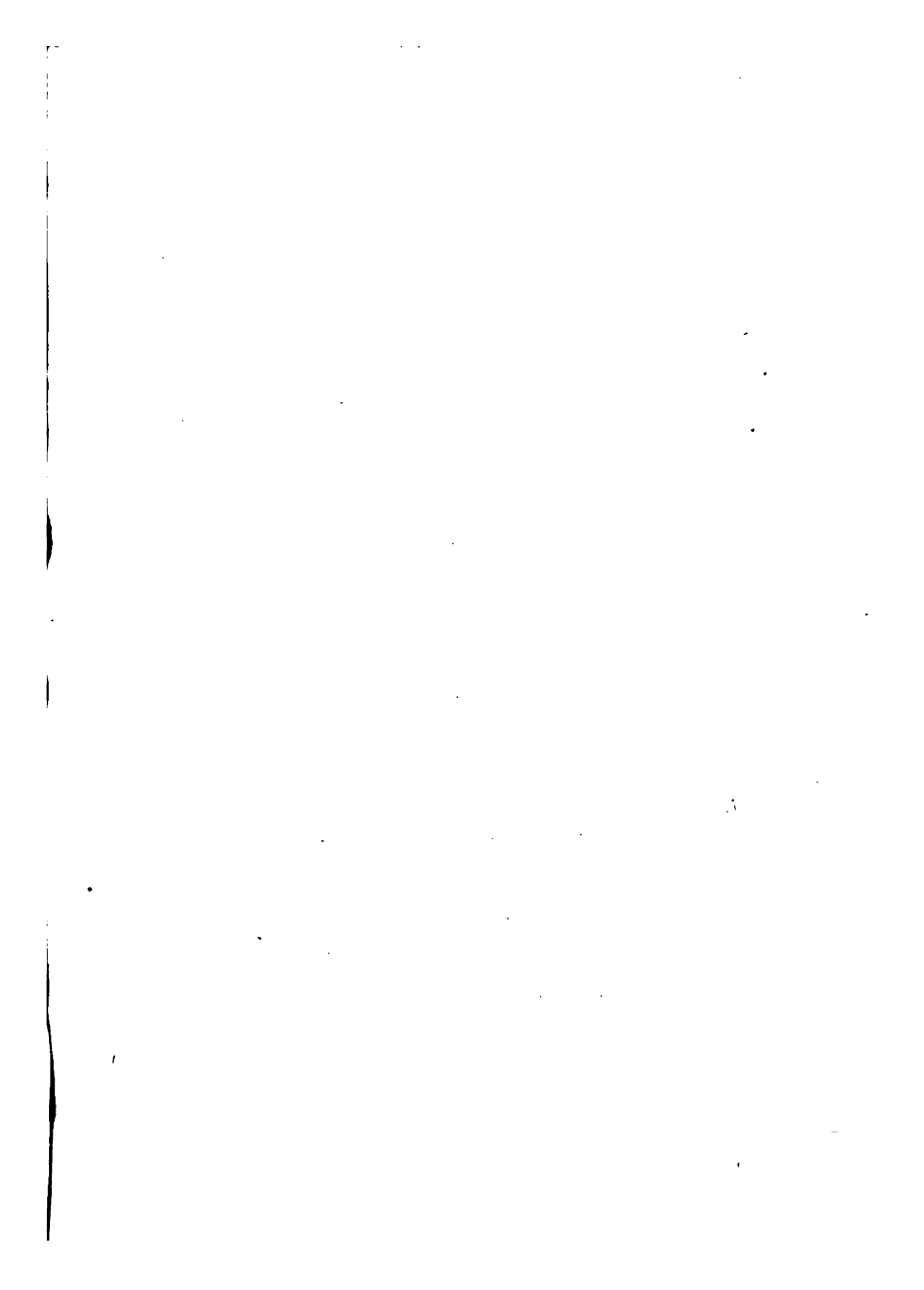
"Build your own nest as you like," scornfully grumbled an old bird. "'Twill have none of *my* help. I know better. You will never be able to build it in *that* way—it will only be a waste of time and materials to attempt it, for of course you'll have to give it up at last. And even if you could, you would never like it when it was done; you'd soon find that the *corners* were not very comfortable."

"Well, we'll try," said the young pair hopefully. "It would be such a great thing, if we could only manage to do it."

"Pooh, pooh!" snarled the old bird; "these new-fangled ways never come to any thing. I've seen them tried before in my time."

"Never mind; we are not to be discouraged

by you, old Mr. Prejudice. Progress for us!" cried the young birds; and off they flew in search of materials to build a nest that was to be superior to any that had ever been built before. But I did not see how they succeeded in their efforts; for just then one of those foolish boys who are always popping about with guns came near, and, mischievously firing at the birds, dispersed the pretty creatures, though luckily missing them all, and with the birds frightened away my dream. I lay still for some time, with the soft, green light peeping through my half-opened eyelids, in hopes of a return of sleep and dreams, but in vain. The charm was broken, and the bird voices had ceased to amuse me. But my book seemed dull after they were gone, and the wood a far less cheerful place than before; and I soon returned home again. Since then I have often listened to them with great attention, but have never been able to make out a word that they were saying.





**Aunt Emily's Story of the Birds.**

1. The first of these is the fact that the

second of these is the fact that the

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fifteenth of these is the fact that the

*Journal of Management Education*

"I wonder at that," said aunt Emily; "after the insight you had already obtained into their modes of thought and speech, I think I should have managed to understand them again. But you have given us quite a bird-like conversation, only your birds were most of them a little bit too prosaic."

"Depend upon it, that, like most other new-married people, their talk behind the scenes is chiefly about household comforts and conveniences, breakfast and dinner, and the good things of this life."

"Ah, you destroy all the romance of bird life. I have always liked to think of them as more spiritual in their nature than other creatures, and to fancy that, living a free life in the solitary and beautiful forest, and drinking of the clear spring, made them almost like beings of the elements, 'a joyous-winged and gay-plumed creation' of fairies."

"The bluebirds, then, must have pleased you best."

"O, yes, I was quite satisfied with *them*. However, I suppose birds differ, like men ; and that among them you would find the romantic, the prosaic, and the trifling, as well as among us, if all had your gift of understanding them."

"Come, now, my little bluebirds," said mamma, "it is time for you to go to your nests."

But the little bluebirds were very hard to catch. They flapped their wings, and flew about the room, until a great hawk, in the shape of papa, seized them, and carried them off to some unknown region, whence they appeared no more that night.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE WISE CAT—GRANDMAMMA'S STORY.

WHEN they were all assembled, the next evening, and the children were waiting for their story, grandmamma said,—

“Come here, my little kittens, and listen to me.”

There once lived a very old cat, called Knurremurre, who was so wise that all the other cats for many miles round came to her for advice; and very good was the counsel she gave them. She not only gave lessons in the useful science of rat catching, so sadly neglected by the degenerate cats of the present day, but taught cleanliness, obedience, and all the virtues of cats, to old and young. If any difficulty occurred, she was always appealed to

for setting it right; and many a bloody fight was prevented by her grave rebuke or peace-making counsel, thereby saving many a leg from being broken, and preventing the loss of ears, tails, and whiskers — those articles so useful to cats.

Knurremurre lived in great state and consideration in the house of a gentleman who was very fond of her. She always had a plate and seat provided for her by his side at meals, and a soft cushion under his library table, where she slept at his feet, or purred and rubbed herself against his slippers, as he sat in his arm chair surrounded by his books and papers. This gentleman was very fond of cats, and had quite a colony of them about the place, though none were so honored as Knurremurre; for none deserved it as she did, not only on account of her great age, but for her wisdom and goodness. She was the ancestress of all the cats in the house, and was generally supposed to be about two hundred and

fifty years of age ; but the truth was, that she was born on the same day as her master, and her age was exactly fifty-two—a long life for a cat. He had played with her in infancy and childhood, until he had become so fond of her that he had cherished her ever since as a companion to his somewhat lonely life. She was equally fond of *him*, and as careful of his interests as a cat could be, and was so active and sprightly in her motions as to bid fair to live for a century, being even now a better mouser than any of her descendants.

One bright summer morning, three young cats, who lived in the same house, found themselves each the mother of kittens. One of them was a graceful and pretty white cat, whose name was Tidy ; another was a nice fat tortoise-shell, named Easy ; and the third was a cross-grained black cat, with sharp, green eyes, who was called Tartar. They were all highly delighted with their kittens, and began licking and fondling the little things, and

proudly showing them to each other ; every cat in her secret heart believing the rest to be frights, and her own perfect little beauties. As soon as the little, feeble, mewling things were taken care of, covered up warmly in the soft hay of the barn, and made quiet and comfortable, the three cats began to gossip, as became young mothers like them.

“For my part,” said Tidy, “the responsibility of bringing up these children weighs heavily upon my mind. I am sure I want to train them up in the way that cats should go, and not to have them careless, idle, and disobedient, or irreverent to their elders, dirty and thieving, like so many of the kittens we see growing up around us. But how to set about it—that is what troubles me. Why should I, who am no better than other cats, succeed better than they in bring up my kittens? I mean to try for it, however, for I earnestly desire it. But I wish that I had some one to show me how to do it.”

"O, never mind," drawled out Easy; "I rather think they will do well enough, as their mother did before them. I wouldn't trouble my head about the matter if I were you. I'm sure *I* don't intend to. Only give them enough to eat and drink, and let them have their own way, and they will get on very nicely. I think the best way is to take it easy, and not worry yourself or your kittens to death with education."

"You don't know what you are talking about," exclaimed Tartar, with flashing eyes. "Let kittens do as they like!! No, indeed! *I*, at least, shall do no such silly thing. I intend that mine shall be kept close enough, I can tell you, and be made to mind what they are about. They shall obey the slightest word or look from me, without reasoning or delay. What I say is to be law; and if they dare gainsay it, or give one rebellious mew, woe betide them. I shall punish them till I break every bone in their bodies, sooner than allow them

to contradict me or thwart my will. Severity and strictness are the best school for young kittens. You must break their spirits, if you expect to have them good for any thing."

"I don't quite agree with either of you," said Tidy; "but, from want of experience, I cannot pretend to tell you what I think is the best way, for I hardly know it myself. If my own dear mother had not so lately gone the way of all cats, I could seek her counsel; but now I have no one to apply to." And Tidy paused, and wiped her eyes with her paw in a feeling manner.

"O, I have thought of something," exclaimed she, after sitting for some minutes sunk in a revery. "Let us go to Knurremurre, and ask her advice about bringing up our kittens. My mother always revered her, and sought her on occasions of difficulty."

"Nonsense!" said Tartar. "I think I know well enough how to manage my family, with-

out asking the advice of that antiquated thing. You don't get me to go."

"O, yes, do let us go," persisted Tidy; "she is thought to be immensely wise by all the cats I know; and, to tell you the truth, I don't quite like to go alone."

"We are very comfortable here," said Easy, "in this warm hay. Why should we disturb ourselves just now?"

"Why, Easy, it is a matter of far more consequence than our own ease and comfort. Do, pray, let us go at once. Tartar consents; and there comes old Furryback—I will ask the good-natured old soul to take care of the kittens till we come home."

In short, Tidy at last persuaded the other cats to accompany her, and they set out for the library, making their way through the spacious halls of the mansion. But when they arrived at the door, they, who had always lived as humble cats in the outhouses, were so dazzled by the splendors within, that for some

time they dared not enter. The gayly-bound and gilded volumes, the massive bookcases, and magnificent furniture quite bewildered them; but at last Tartar, who was not much gifted with modesty, took courage, and led the way into the room. The others, seeing that she was not repulsed, soon followed; and they stole across the superb carpet, which seemed softer to their feet than the velvet moss on the roof of the barn, and gayer than a flower garden, and stood by the embroidered cushion where Knurremurre lay in great state at her master's feet. As she raised her head to see who was coming, so dignified and majestic did she look—for she was a cat of great size and beauty, and of the purest Maltese blood—that they all felt awed by her presence, and even the sharp and conceited Tartar was humbled. At last Tidy found boldness to speak.

“We are three ignorant young cats,” (“Speak for yourself,” muttered Tartar, under her whiskers,) “who have become mothers to-day for



the first time, and, earnestly wishing the welfare of our kittens, have come to implore your counsel on the subject, not trusting our own inexperience to guide us."

"You are a good young creature," said Knurremurre, looking kindly on her, "and deserve the best advice that I can give." But she glanced doubtfully at the other cats, for she was an excellent physiognomist.

"My daughters," said she, solemnly, "let the law of love be the rule by which you govern your kittens. Set them an example of kindness, gentleness, affection, and industry, that they may love you, and through you all that is good and right. Make your kittens your friends, and win their confidence by kindness as early as possible in their lives. Instil into their minds gratitude to our great benefactor, and teach them to strive earnestly to repay his benefits as far as lies in their power, by helping to keep his premises free from rats and mice. Teach them to labor diligently in that

their calling, and to attend to those chief virtues of a cat, cleanliness, submission, and order. Encourage them to be cheerful and merry while they are kittens, that they may become calm and dignified in their deportment when cats. Indulge them as far as possible in every thing that is innocent; but when once a rule is made, insist upon obedience. Be kind, yet firm, and use correction gently; but do not omit it altogether, especially when your kittens are too young and wilful to hear reason. Do not be capricious with them, and forbid a thing one day which you allow them the next, but be careful what you say. Above all, teach them to keep the peace, for a fighting cat is the pest of any neighborhood."

From this Knurremurre went on to give them a long and useful lecture, enlarging on the subject with great wisdom. Tidy paid her the closest attention, and seemed very grateful for her advice; but I am sorry to say that Easy fell fast asleep, and Tartar appeared very

tired and impatient. At length they all took their leave, and, with Knurremurre's blessing upon their earnest efforts, returned to the barn, where they found that their kittens had remained safe and well under the kind care of Furryback. Tidy lay down by her kittens, and pondered in her heart all the things that she had heard. Easy, however, went to sleep again, and thought very little about them; and as for Tartar, she laughed them to scorn.

Weeks passed by, and the kittens grew and waxed fat, and were all pretty and frolicsome, so that for a while no one could tell one family from another. But in time a great difference began to be perceived. Tidy's kittens lived together in the greatest peace and harmony, and dearly loved each other and their mother, growing daily more obedient, orderly, and charming, so that it was a pleasure to watch their innocent gambols; while Tartar's were always quarrelling and fighting together, and spitting and scratching at the passers-by.

and were a most unmannerly and disagreeable set. Tartar was very severe and unkind to them; in fact, she was as ill-tempered a cat as could be found, and Tidy and Easy found her a very bad neighbor. The most delicate of her kittens pined away and died from the harsh treatment they received; and the rest hated their mother, and strove to deceive her in every way. They became complete little hypocrites, obeying her when they were in her presence, but as soon as her back was turned, doing every kind of wickedness. She kept them upon very short commons and the most indifferent food, preserving all the titbits for herself; and they soon learned to steal, to satisfy their hunger, and to tell the most skilful lies, to conceal their thefts. They inherited from their mother a quarrelsome disposition, and a love for slander and every species of malicious scandal, which her example and management only served to foster, till they were hated by all around them, and became the

pests of the neighborhood from their mischief-making ways. As they grew older, they grew worse and worse, until Tartar lost the motherly affection she had at first felt for them, and became more and more unkind, while they, as they grew stronger, retorted upon her, and the barn constantly rung with their fierce disputes. At last, one night, the strongest and largest of the three, who had survived kittenhood, had a most bloody pitched battle with her own mother. No cat dared to approach, or separate the savage combatants, for fear of her own life. The night was very dark, and nothing could be known of the progress of the fight save from the light of their wild, glaring eyes, and the snarling sounds of hate and malice they made as they scratched and tore one another. At last all was still; and when the morning dawned, they both lay dead and mangled on the floor! The two that remained took no warning from this, but continued their mean and detestable practices, and

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their acquaintance was cut by all respectable cats. At last one of them was torn in pieces by the mastiff who was kept chained in the yard. She had repeatedly stolen his dinner, until at last he could bear it no longer ; and, watching his opportunity, when she came within reach of his chain, he took his revenge once and forever. The other was publicly hung by the cook, for her constant thefts in the larder ; and thus ended this misguided family, who prospered a while in their evil courses, but at last met the punishment they deserved — a fearful lesson to parents who treat their children with ill temper and severity.

Easy, meanwhile, ate, drank, and slept, and took no trouble about any thing. She let her kittens do just as they liked, never thinking of controlling them, or of teaching them, or training them in any way. As for them, they were the most lazy and ignorant kittens imaginable. They never thought of such a thing as catching a rat or a mouse, or of making

themselves useful in any way, as, indeed, poor things! how should they, having never been taught? They had no manners, and, worse than all, they never looked clean. They had no notion of washing their faces, or licking their fur; and in consequence, though they were really pretty cats, they always looked sooty and vulgar. Then, by constant indulgence of their appetites, they became very selfish and fond of good eating; and they were very conceited, as ignorant cats usually are, and thought themselves too good to associate with others, so that the proud creatures learned nothing from mingling with the world, and were shunned at last as insufferable by their former friends. These pompous, overfed gluttons had none of the usual activity of kittens; and the happy family spent all their time that was not given to eating in snoring together, rolled up in the hay. At last, the housekeeper, finding that the number of cats had increased beyond all bearing, resolved to

get rid of the useless ones, and had Easy and her family all drowned at once in the mill pond, as mere lazy consumers, who never twirled a whisker or lifted a paw for the public good.

But she patted Tidy on the back, and gave her a saucer of cream ; for she found her, with her kittens, well employed in slaughtering rats, while the bodies of nine, that they had killed that day, lay near them, as trophies of their hard-fought battles. Tidy was a capital mouser, and had taken great pains to make her children like her ; and with success, for pains-taking is almost always rewarded. She had taught them to be neat and clean, so that there never was a spot seen upon their snowy fur ; and they lived together in peace and harmony, so that never had there been heard a quarrelsome mew among them, but they were known every where as the happiest and best family of cats on the place. Knurremurre was heard to say that Tidy's eldest daughter was as good a mouser as she herself had been at the same



age ; and this produced a great sensation among the cats, for every one knew what a famous destroyer of rats and mice she had been in her day. Tidy and her family are living still, respected and beloved by all, and held next in favor only to Knurremurre in the household. As for Knurremurre, she still lies on her velvet cushion, growing wiser and wiser as she grows older ; and so renowned is she, that cats have been known to journey from far countries to learn from her lips the lessons of wisdom.

This was the last night of the holidays, and the children were allowed to sit up a little later than usual, to play with their uncles and aunts some Christmas games that Santa Claus had given them. Then they begged grand-mamma, as it was the last night of the stories, to tell them about the Wise Cat over again, and she kindly did as they wished. But when she had done, George was found to have fallen

fast asleep on the floor, while Blossom was holding her eyes open with her fingers. So they found that every pleasure at last comes to an end; and, as they were too sleepy to walk up stairs, they were carried to bed in a mimic procession, and so the frolic was ended. The next day was a sad one, for all their dear friends left them to return to their home; but the pain of parting was less keen, because that home was in a city not far off, and they hoped often to see them. Yet it was but once a year that they all met together, at the merry Christmas time; and Blossom thought it would be a long time till next Christmas. But the joys of winter — their merry sports, pretty toys, and, above all, their daily lessons, that mamma made so pleasant to them — soon filled their little minds with the passing hour, and they were as happy and gay as ever. But often, after a merry game of snowballing, or at the evening fireside, Blossom would say, "O mamma, what a delightful Christmas we had this winter! I

wish Christmas came every month." And then her father or mother would perhaps tell them a story, if they had been good and diligent that day. And if you will all be good children, perhaps you may one day hear them too.

But I awake from a pleasant dream. My little Blossom and her brother, their cheerful home, kind friends, and merry Christmas fade away from before my eyes; the sweet voices and the gay laughter die away; and I find myself by my own fireside, in the silence of the night. Let me console myself for its loneliness in the thought, that perhaps some young faces may be made brighter for my efforts to amuse them, and I shall be rewarded, little folks, for endeavoring to add one feeble ray to the sunshine of your merry Christmas.

THE END.

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